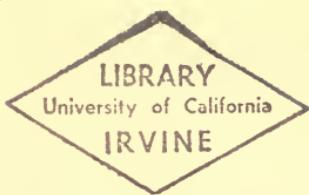


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The Dugdale Millions

A NOVEL

By BARCLAY NORTH, (Wm. C. Hudson),
author of "*The Diamond Button*," "*Whose
Was It*," "*Vivier of Vivier*, Longman &
Co.," "*On the Rack*," "*The Man With a
Thumb*," "*520 Per Cent.*," etc. . . .



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THE DUGDALE MILLIONS.

CHAPTER I.

A PERPLEXING COMMISSION.

“MR. HETLOW has asked twice for you, Mr. Mason.”

These words were respectfully addressed by a lad to a young man who had just entered the counting-room of Hetlow, Altmount & Co., in Cliff Street.

The young man stopped short in astonishment.

“Mr. Hetlow!” he repeated incredulously. “At this hour?”

“He has been in his room since before nine o’clock,” replied the young lad, as if in confirmation of his statement.

The color mounted slightly to the cheeks of Mason, who was widely known as “Dick,” and, also, to many who did not presume to call him such when talking with him. He threw off his light overcoat, for it was when autumn had just fallen upon the year, and handed it to the young lad standing respectfully beside him.

As he walked to his own desk he muttered:

“Now what is the meaning of this?”

Standing irresolutely beside his chair for a moment, he turned sharply with an air of determination, and passed into the corridor leading to the room occupied by the head of the great concern.

Once out of sight of the clerks, all of whom he knew were watching him covertly, he stopped and bent his head in deep thought. After a brief moment rousing himself, he said aloud in a low tone.

"He has come to know that I went up last night to that garden party at Farmington. Well, even so! Suppose his charming daughter was stopping at the Negleys'! He cannot expect to control the invitations sent out by the people his daughter visits. He can hardly have learned that my invitation was due to the kindly offices of the charming Bessie. Perhaps he has come to know that I spent an hour with that sweet girl behind the ferns in the greenery. If he has, someone stayed up all night to inform him. Well, here goes for a tussle with the Tycoon. There will be a row, I suppose."

He hurried along the corridor, at the end of which there was a door on which there was a silver plate, bearing the name of the head of the concern.

He opened it without knocking, and stepped in, with the easy assurance of one who knew he had the *entrée*.

The room was sumptuously furnished for a business office. The carpet on the floor was so thick as to deaden all footfalls; easy-chairs of stuffed leather abounded; on the walls were oil paintings and about the room rare bits of china and valuable bronzes. In one corner, at a desk, so placed that the best light fell upon it, was sitting an impressive-looking old gentleman, portly, gray-headed, dignified in demeanor.

"You wished to see me, I understand," said Dick, as he approached the desk, leaning his left elbow on the top, in an easy manner.

Mr. Hetlow looked up from the papers over which he was poring, with a frown on his brow, which faded away as he looked upon the pleasant picture of youth and manly beauty Dick presented, braced as he was for the contest he anticipated.

"I asked twice for you," he said at length, "and was told you were not yet come."

"No," replied Dick carelessly, "I ran out of town a short distance last night. One train to return by was much too early, the other a little too late. I took the one a little too late."

Apparently not heeding the answer, the old merchant laid the papers away from his hand and pushed back his chair.

"Sit down, Mason," he said, pointing to a seat. "I have a most delicate matter to speak to you about."

"It's coming," said Dick in an underbreath, as he sat down.

"You have been connected with this house a number of years, and I and my partners appreciate your abilities and know we can trust you."

"I wonder who the deuce told him," muttered Dick.

"And I feel," continued the old merchant, "that the trust and confidence reposed in you justifies me in expecting a return from you in a matter which is without the province of your duties here."

Dick replied with a bow, saying to himself, "I'd give half a year's salary to know who informed him."

"I have received a letter which greatly annoys me —so perplexing that I hesitate as to the course I should pursue."

"I could suggest a course satisfactory to myself," muttered Dick.

"The matter comes close home to me because it affects my daughter Bessie. She is all I have left, since her mother died, and this thing will affect her life very much."

"Naturally," said Dick aloud, adding to himself, "whether she is Mrs. Mason or Mrs. Somebody Else naturally will."

The merchant looked into Dick's face quickly as he inquired: "Why, naturally? You do not know what it is yet."

The young man pulled himself together with a start. "The remark was made at random. Please go on, sir."

Mr. Hetlow continued his gaze upon the young man a moment or two, as if it pleased him to look upon the bright, open face, and then went on, plunging abruptly into his tale, to Dick's manifest surprise.

"Samuel Dugdale died six months ago in England, a very old man, leaving a vast estate, the income of which is more than two hundred thousand pounds. He married in middle life and his wife bore him a son and daughter, dying shortly after. Ten years before his death his daughter, never having married, died, leaving as his sole relatives his son and a sister. The son and the father did not agree. The former was bent on his pleasures, while the father desired him to maintain the traditions of the house and bear his part in the business, which had descended from father to son for more than two centuries. Finally the son added to his refusal to enter the business house the marrying of a public dancer. Thereupon the father cast him off, refusing to provide for him in any way. In a short time the son and his wife dropped out of sight. For a number of years nothing was heard from him, when a letter, dated from New York, was received by the elder Dugdale begging assistance, setting forth that he was wretchedly poor; that his wife was dead and, as he feared, from want and exposure; that he was left with a child—a boy—then two years old. At first, stern and unyielding, old Samuel Dugdale would not consider the letter, but subsequently thinking that the woman who had been the bar to his son's reformation was dead, that the son had been severely disciplined by adversity, and that there was now a male in the third generation—two lives to bear the house forward—called a trusted clerk, told him to forward relief immediately, then proceed to New York and bring his

son and grandson home at once. On arriving, however, the clerk found that Edmund Dugdale, for such was the son's name, was dead, and buried by charity. Before his death the child had disappeared; no trace of him being discoverable. The clerk returned to England, but was sent back to search for the child—a search made without result and abandoned after a year or two.

"Now," continued Mr. Hetlow, growing more impressive, "Samuel Dugdale died intestate, and, if this child cannot be found, why, since she is the daughter of the sister of Samuel Dugdale, and therefore is the next of kin, my daughter Bessie inherits this vast property and becomes the largest wool merchant in the world."

So utterly unexpected was the conclusion of the old merchant that Dick Mason nearly lost that *sangfroid* which it was the boast of his friends never forsook him, under the most trying occasions.

"By Heavens," he murmured, "what chance have I with a girl with a million for an income. It was bad enough before, but now—"

"Now," continued Mr. Hetlow, deeply interested in his tale and unmindful of the effect produced upon Dick, "I have a letter from the family solicitor in London, informing me of this condition of affairs, but strongly asserting that before steps are taken to put Miss Hetlow in possession of all this property, I should make sure the grandchild does not exist, and will not turn up to make trouble and disappoint hopes that have settled into certainty. In other words, the solicitor puts upon me the burden of discovering whether or not the fellow exists. If he does, he must now be a young man of twenty-six or seven. It is a trying and strange position in which to place a man—to force him to a search for one, who, if found, will deprive his daughter of an enormous fortune. I do

not think I am more dishonorable than the average of men, but I freely confess I am afraid to trust myself in this matter—afraid that by reason of the great interests involved, I may be betrayed into stopping short of that energy and persistency necessary to make a search. It will be a difficult one after such a lapse of years, but it must be made—honestly and exhaustively made. The fact of the grandson's existence or death must be determined. You, my dear Mason, are a disinterested person."

"Not so entirely disinterested after all," thought Dick with a grimace.

"You are attached to the house—keen, sharp, and energetic—and, as I have frequently remarked, possessed of a great faculty for getting at the bottom of things. I feel that I can trust you to protect my honor, and protect it against myself, by using all the requisite energy and ability. You will perceive upon examination it is no small trust I am reposing in you. I want you to take it in hand at once. The expense will be borne by the estate and your drafts will be honored. Here," continued Mr. Hetlow, as he handed Dick a bundle of documents, "are copies of papers forwarded by the solicitor. After you have read them, you will know all I or anyone else can tell you."

Dick took the papers, fingering them over in an abstracted manner. Mr. Hetlow waited for him to make some remarks, but hearing none he went on:

"I know most people would say let the young man find himself, but I hoped I could induce you to see the matter as I do, and that a moral obligation rests upon me to make a vigorous and energetic search. Am I mistaken?"

"No, sir," said Dick promptly. "You are not mistaken. Your wishes shall be obeyed. You have not only induced me to see the matter as you do, but you have made me appreciate the keen sense of honor that

induces you to put the search on foot, and to put it into the hands of one you think will not be influenced by considerations of personal interests."

The face of the old gentleman flushed with pleasure. He arose from his chair and extending his hand to the young man said:

"I thought *you* would understand me."

Dick had risen at the same time. He stood a moment deeply thinking; finally, with an air of timidity, he asked:

"Does Miss Hetlow know of this matter?"

"No," replied the merchant, "she is not at home, and this information has reached me during her absence. I have not yet determined what is the best course to pursue—whether to withhold the facts for the present so as not to accustom her to hopes and aspirations which may never be realized, or whether to inform her, dwelling strongly upon the possibility that the grandson may be found."

Dick was about to speak, but suddenly checked himself.

"You were about to say something, Mason," said Mr. Hetlow.

"I was about to offer some advice, but a second thought suggested its impertinence."

"Nothing would be impertinence after the trust I have given you," said the old merchant kindly.

"I would not inform her. The contemplation of such riches, it seems to me, must necessarily affect the imagination, and, if I find the grandson, the disappointment must of necessity be very great."

"Perhaps," rejoined Mr. Hetlow thoughtfully.

"You have nothing more to say to me," asked Dick, as he moved to the door.

"Nothing except, and it is not important, that nearly thirty years ago a man called at our house in Bond Street, claiming relationship with my wife, who

he said was his aunt, and that his name was Edmund Dugdale. Not having heard at the time of the differences between Edmund and his father, believing him still to be pursuing his gay career in London, and because the man was so shabby and clearly in want of money, we treated him as an impostor. That is all. You have everything I can tell you and a *carte blanche* to proceed as you think best."

Dick went out, carrying the papers with him. As the door closed upon him he stood still in the passage-way that led to his own room, with his head bent to the floor for some time, and then he spoke his thoughts aloud.

"Well," he ejaculated, "by the great hickory post that played the banjo before General Jackson, this is a go! I don't think I quite take it all in. I am in love with Bessie Hetlow. Whether she is with me is an unsolved problem, and before it is solved, she rises upon my vision as an heiress of gigantic possibilities and proportions, and I am asked to find a man who, if he exists and presents himself, will reduce her to a poverty of about a hundred thousand a year. I am to do this wrong to the woman I love. If I do not find this young man, or find him dead, she will sail off into the region where lords and dukes disport the prismatic rays of their jeweled coronets as glittering baits to trap unwary heiresses and wholly beyond my reach. If I do not find him, the aforesaid dukes and princes will not spread their glittering bait and there may be a chance for Dick Mason, who has nothing but his virtues and good clothes to commend him."

He lost himself in thought again. Finally he walked off, saying:

"My heart aches for that poor young man, deprived of all the luxuries these millions would bring him. I'll find him if it takes one of these shapely legs. It will be tough on Bessie, but then she can compensate

herself for her loss by the possession of this stout and manly heart. I'll find Dugdale junior, and make *him* the largest wool merchant in the world."

He went to his own desk, and settled himself to a careful perusal of the documents.

CHAPTER II.

A REVELATION.

THE country-place of Mr. Hetlow, at which he lived six months of each year, was on the Hudson, above Dobbs Ferry. A princely estate in all save territory, what it lacked in extent, it made up in the superb state of its cultivation and the extreme beauty of the grounds which immediately surrounded the house.

Mr. Hetlow was an Englishman, but he had lived from early manhood in America, so long indeed that he had forgotten that he had ever been a British subject. His favorite boast was that he was a good American citizen, with a comfortable stake in the country. His father, when alive, had had an interest in the firm of Samuel Dugdale & Son, of London, the name by which the firm had been known for nearly two centuries. It would not do, perhaps, to say that he was a partner, but, as was the custom of that house after years of faithful service, the responsible heads were given a share in the profits in addition to their salaries. This had made him rich, and, as he was the manager of the concern, had given him rank and influence. When, in the course of the needs of the widely extending business, it appeared that an agent in New York City was advisable, he was influential enough to secure the appointment for his son Howard, the present Hetlow, then employed in the home office and about thirty.

In the New World the young man thrived, broadened out into business on his own account, and, with

the assistance of his father, founded the great concern of Hetlow, Altmount & Co., always remaining the agent of Samuel Dugdale & Son. On one of his visits to the old country, he had married the younger sister—a half sister in fact, since her mother was the stepmother of the Dugdale but recently dead—and with the fortune she had brought him, he had so extended his business that he had taken the lead in his line in this country.

At the time of the beginning of this tale, that is to say in 1883, he was a man of sixty, so hale and hearty that few believed him to be more than fifty. His wife was dead and his daughter, now but little turned of twenty, was his only child.

Though he boasted his thorough identification with America and American interests, still he retained many British and insular prejudices, one of which was a peculiar contempt for American architecture. Consequently when he built his country residence, it was strong enough for a fortress and large enough for several families. It was in fact a reproduction of the old Dugdale mansion in Kent—a lordly and stately dwelling.

Immediately adjoining his place was that of Andrew Stanton, a lawyer practicing in New York, who had inherited his property from his father. The house was a large, roomy, rambling, wooden structure of the colonial period, as distinctly American as the Hetlow mansion was distinctly British. And Mr. Stanton was as diametrically opposed, in methods of thought and ways of life, to Mr. Hetlow as their respective houses were opposed to each other. Nevertheless they were the best of friends, and though from the time Mr. Hetlow left in the autumn to take up his residence in his town house, until he returned in the spring, the two men never saw each other, they renewed their intimacy at that season of the year as if

a day only had parted them, and quarreled over their politics and religion with a hearty liking for each other.

Mrs. Stanton was a second wife, some twenty-five years younger than her husband. She was a good, kindly woman—hospitable and charitable, but possessed of the demon jealousy. Certainly the life of her husband did not justify the doubts she entertained, but as she was a woman thoroughly ingrained with superstition, devoutly believing in the revelation of the unknown by means of signs and dreams, she pursued him with her suspicions. As she was nightly dreaming that he was making tender love to some woman she had never known or heard of, she was daily vexing herself with jealousy of the unknown, to his infinite perplexity and irritation. Moreover she had frequent recourse to the cards, as revealing his relations to the fair sex, and seasoned his dinners with veiled allusions to a diamond woman, or a spade woman, to his complete mystification and the intense amusement of the other member of his household, a young girl.

This young girl was Mr. Stanton's niece, an orphan he cared for, the child of his younger sister—Wallis Gladwin—a frolicsome sprite with a rare fund of humor, whose mischievousness brightened, as well as perplexed, the somber old house. She was the bosom friend of Bessie Hetlow though three years her junior, and in all things, complexion, size, spirits, mind, and humor, the direct opposite of her friend. Beauty, though widely different, they possessed in common. They loved each other as dearly as sisters never separated could, and were devout believers in each other. The house of one was almost the house of the other. In this friendship Mr. Hetlow and Mr. Stanton and his wife acquiesced, notwithstanding the former stood somewhat in dread of the quick tongue and independent personality of Wallis, and the headlong directness with which she plunged in and arrived at the

truth of things which seemed obscure to him, and notwithstanding the latter gentleman feared the influence upon his ward, the knowledge of the luxuries of wealth she obtained through her close association with Bessie would naturally exert.

It was a sunny afternoon in late September, that Bessie returned to her home from her visit to the Negleys on Long Island. She sent word to Wallis that she was home and was dying to see her, as soon as she arrived, which message brought Wallis in haste to the Hetlow mansion.

Notwithstanding Dick's advice, Mr. Hetlow, after consultation with his lawyer, had determined to prepare his daughter's mind for the brilliant possibilities opening to her. He was anxious to have the matter off his mind. With Dick prosecuting the search vigorously and his daughter properly informed, he could, with easy conscience, return to his pursuits of business and pleasure. He therefore awaited her return with impatience. Before leaving for the city on the morning of the day his daughter was to return, he wrote her a letter saying that he had a matter of grave importance to communicate to her, upon his return, begging she would make no engagement to interfere with this communication.

Bessie was reading the letter when Wallis entered and found her grave and puzzled by its formality. The two friends sat down to speculate upon what it might portend.

"Someone has proposed for your hand," said Wallis positively.

This was her favorite speculation—a brilliant proposal of marriage for her friend—a thought which desolated her when she recalled the separation it would entail.

"Oh, dear! I hope not," cried Bessie. "I do hate these ready-made courtships where the man

comes with the blessing of the father upon the union, before there has been a word of love."

"Let us go over to Aunt Ellen and get her to cut the cards for its meaning," laughed Wallis. "The dear old girl is in the humor for it. She is in great grief to-day."

"In great grief?" repeated Bessie, in wonder.

"Yes, in great grief. She dreamed last night that she saw Uncle Andrew kissing a beautiful woman in a red shawl, and she is so jealous of that woman that she is to-day bemoaning her sad fate and the misery she is subjected to."

"Oh, no; we won't go," replied Bessie, "we will only be treated to a lament over the miseries of matrimony and a lecture on the joys of spinsterhood."

"Perhaps, Bess," exclaimed Wallis, after a moment of silence, during which she had curled herself into a queer little heap on the lounge, "perhaps Mr. Mason has declared himself to your father."

The color rose to the cheeks of the fair young girl, and she said with an evident effort at contempt:

"Mr. Mason! If he has, I shall say no at once, and most emphatically."

"Why?" asked Wallis, her black eyes opened to their fullest extent. "Bess, you mustn't tell me you don't like him, for I know that you do. Don't you think I have seen it?"

"Do you suppose," retorted Bessie, with much haste, as if she found refuge in the words, "do you suppose that I could have any respect for a man who would go to your father before he sued for your hand? Certainly not. That would be taking all the spirit out the affair. It must be like that drink your uncle takes, when he burns all the alcohol out of his brandy. Just think of it! Afraid to speak to the girl before he gets the father's consent, then having obtained it, comes expecting her to fall down before him, because,

forsooth, her father favors his suit. Bah, I'd despise such a man, as every girl of spirit would. Mr. Mason wouldn't do such a thing. No, he'd rather run away with the girl first and ask the father afterward."

"Therefore, you do not despise Mr. Mason," remarked Wallis with a sly glance.

"I don't say that I despise him, or I don't! Why should I? However, you are wrong."

"And why, my pretty demure puss?"

"Because—because I know."

"Most excellent reason, but not very clear," replied the cynic on the lounge.

"Well, I've seen Mr. Mason—only a day or two ago."

"Oh, where? Tell me all about it."

Cynicism lost in interest.

"At the Negleys'. He came up to the garden party. And we had a long—well we had a talk. And Wallis, what do you think he told me?"

"Oh, go on, don't be so slow telling it."

"He said that my father had given him a direct hint that his calls at our house were not quite the thing in a clerk."

"The beast!"

"Who? Mr. Mason?"

"No, your father. You agreed with your father of course."

"Of course I didn't. I couldn't be so impolite."

"What did you tell him? That they were just the thing and you wept when they were not?"

"Nonsense! I evaded any reply—in words that is."

"Oh! But made him understand that the daughter differed with the father on this important question?"

"Not at all. He was so pressing—so ardent in fact, that I had to play stiff Miss Propriety, and then you know we had been for an hour in the greenery by ourselves—Heavens!" she broke off with a scream.

"What is it? For gracious sake what?" cried Wallis in alarm.

"That is what the letter is about."

"What, the greenery?"

"Yes; someone has told father!"

"There will be a time. I must be with you when the storm breaks."

"No, no; I don't care for myself. All he can do will be to scold, but poor Dick——"

"Oh, poor Dick—— It's poor Dick now, is it?"

"Please don't tease, because this is very serious. You know Dick—that is, Mr. Mason, is in papa's office, and if papa were to cut up rough it might be very serious for Mr. Mason."

"And if he does?"

"Well, it may be very hard on Mr. Mason. Just for fancying one, you know."

"Just for loving his employer's daughter. But you see he ought not to aspire so high, and the lovely princess should not stoop to so lowly a knight."

"Mr. Mason is a gentleman."

"But as poor as I am—the traditional church mouse. Yet if you are irretrievably steeped in your folly, and if Papa Hetlow proceeds to extremes, you will have but one thing to do."

"What?"

"Marry poor Dick and compel the Hetlow Fortress to succumb from attacks from without."

"What? Without his even asking me to marry him?"

"I presume he has done that already."

"No, he has not even presumed to do so. I wouldn't let him go so far."

"Bess," cried Wallis, uncurling herself and assuming great severity. "You are not flirting with that young man?"

"Suppose I am, what then?"

"You are not leading him on just to throw him over and break his heart? Bess, I don't—I can't believe it of you."

"Why not? I'm sure it's no more than I have seen you do a score of times."

"You never saw me flirt with anything but a rich young man. I never in all my life tried to break the heart of a poor young man."

"Where is the difference?"

"Bess, I know the pangs of poverty, and I have deep sympathy for that poor young man, Dick Mason, with his lovely mustache. What will he have to console him, when you break his heart? You throw him over and not only does he lose the loveliest and most beautiful girl in all the world, but a lot of money besides. If you are determined to break hearts break a rich man's heart, then he's got his money to console him."

"So you think Mr. Mason is after money."

"No, I don't. And you know he isn't. I don't believe Dick Mason cares a copper penny for all the money your father has got."

"You seem to be a warm friend of Mr. Mason."

"I am, and I mean he shall know it. And Bess, if you don't love that Dick Mason and marry him too, I'll never speak to you again, and I'll—I'll—I'll——"

"Marry him yourself?"

"No, I won't; he's too poor."

"Who is mercenary now?" laughed Bessie.

Before Wallis could retort, the roll of wheels upon the gravel of the carriageway was heard. The young girl springing to the window cried out:

"It is your father, Bess. Now comes the tug of war. Shall I stay? No? Then I'll run home and come back after dinner to learn who is victor in the sanguinary battle."

She had hardly left the apartment when a servant

announced to Bessie that her father would be pleased to see her in the library.

Bracing herself for the shock she was convinced she was to sustain, and assuming the demurest expression she could summon, Bessie descended to the room, which from her earliest childhood had been associated with scoldings, punishment, and serious affairs.

The affectionate greeting of her father surprised her, for she was nerved to encounter stern looks and reproaches.

"Since you have been from home, Bessie," he said, as he led her to a recessed window where he sat down with her, "I have received extraordinary news. Before I relate it, I must warn you to receive it with all the self-command you can summon, and also not to build too many hopes upon it, because the matter is not definitely settled. The chances are, I think, that our hopes will be realized. But in either event, I hope to see you bear yourself in a modest and womanly way, and in either event, I am quite certain your qualities of mind and heart will be severely tested."

This exordium greatly whetted the curiosity of Bessie, who was unable to perceive in what direction it tended. Mr. Hetlow related the story he had told Mason some days previously, differing only in that he dwelt more strongly upon the possibility of finding the missing grandson; nevertheless he could not deny himself the pleasure of dilating upon the brilliant future possible for her. When he had finished, her first remark increased his respect for her.

"It will be an awful responsibility," she said. "I shrink from the thought of it."

She was sobered by the tale, not elated. Dreams of a more brilliant existence did not have place with her, upon the contrary she was saddened by the thought of so much riches.

"Perhaps the young man will be found," she con-

tinued after some silence, and she added softly, "I hope he will. If he is alive the money is his. He ought to have it. I hope he is being sought for."

"Yes," replied Mr. Hetlow, who was subject to mixed sensations—pleasure that his daughter bore the news so steadily, and disappointment that she showed no greater appreciation. "Yes, an honest and energetic search is now being made. The whole matter has been placed in the hands of Mr. Mason."

"Who?" she inquired sharply.

"Mr. Mason—Richard Mason—one of our clerks. You know him—a very able, shrewd, and energetic young man; admirably adapted for the labor."

Bessie was silent for a few moments, looking out upon the lawn which she did not see, then asked:

"Does he know all the story?"

"All of it," replied her father.

"Does he understand that if he succeeds in the search he deprives me of millions?"

Her father did not comprehend the meaning back of the question, and replied with a smile:

"He is not dull and must understand such will be the result of his success."

"And he was willing to undertake it—he made no objections?" she persisted.

Her father, still failing to perceive the hidden meaning of her words, replied haughtily:

"I cannot see what interest he can have in it, but to do his duty. I directed him to undertake the search. He is my clerk. He did not undertake it as the act of a friend."

"No," she replied wearily, rising from her seat with a peculiar smile upon her lips. "It does not look like the act of a friend. However, let us hope he will be successful and forget all about it. The thought of so much riches stifles me."

She left her father alone to wonder over the singu-

lar manner his daughter had received the tale, for like most men he placed riches above all things.

And she went to her room to wonder alone over the readiness with which Dick had undertaken to deprive her of a fortune, for like most women she placed the devotion of a heart above all things.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST STEP.

FROM a careful perusal of the documents given him by Mr. Hetlow, Dick gathered these data, as the basis for the search he was to enter upon:

In 1853 Edmund Dugdale, with his wife, arrived in New York and was immediately lost to view; in 1855 he reappeared and was employed by a lawyer named Stanton; in 1856 a child was born to them; in 1857 young Dugdale was discharged by Stanton, under the accusation of having sold valuable papers pertaining to a litigation to the other side; in 1858 he was employed in a minor capacity in the office of the *Courier and Inquirer*, living at the time in MacDougall Street, where his wife died; in 1858 he had applied to his father for relief; in the same year, the lawyer Stanton, hearing the truth as to the lost documents, endeavored to repair the wrong, but was too late, for the man was dying and all he could do was to secure for him a decent burial; the final fact was that a few days before Dugdale's death the child had disappeared and no one could tell where.

The difficulties of Dick's task grew with the consideration of them. A quarter of a century had elapsed since the death of Edmund, and there was every indication that he had kept the fact of his relationship to the great London merchant to himself. The *Courier and Inquirer* was out of existence, and, if by any chance Dick could find anyone employed upon that paper, it was extremely doubtful if recollection of a

man employed in a minor capacity for a short time could be stirred.

The chances of finding the son of Edmund, or of obtaining any knowledge of him, seemed to be small. Duty, however, demanded that he should proceed with his inquiry, but he felt it would be conducted without enthusiasm, because there must necessarily be an absence of belief in a successful outcome.

The final result of all his thoughts upon the subject was the determination to confer with a celebrated detective of the day, Captain Lawton, with whom he was upon friendly terms, with a view of obtaining suggestions as to the best method of proceeding. That shrewd and capable official listened to the tale with interest. "Your task is a difficult one," he said at its conclusion. "You have very little to go upon in the beginning. The first thing you should do, is to take steps to obtain knowledge of the surroundings of Edmund Dugdale while he was living here—the people he knew and associated with. You must begin with the lawyer Stanton. Go to the Law Library and get a list of the lawyers of the name of Stanton practicing in the city in 1855 and trace them down to 1883. Don't bother with those who have come into practice after 1855. Insert an advertisement in all the papers, and keep it standing, for anyone who had knowledge of Edmund Dugdale in the years 1853 to 1857. Something may come of it."

Dick acted upon this advice at once. He could find but one lawyer of the name of Stanton practicing in 1883 who was at the bar in 1855. His name was Andrew Stanton. On calling at his office in Wall Street he was told that Mr. Stanton was gradually retiring from business, and that he was away from the office for long periods of time, nor had anyone knowledge as to when he would next make his appearance. To his surprise, he learned that the house of this law-

yer was immediately adjoining the grounds of Mr. Hetlow above Dobbs Ferry. To make the trip seemed necessary, and he concluded to do it forthwith.

It was a delightful afternoon when he arrived at Dobbs Ferry—one of those soft, balmy days not unfrequent in this climate in the latter part of September and the early part of October, when the air is heavy with languor, and a deep, rich haze settles upon the distant hills. Dick procured a conveyance to carry him to the residence of the old lawyer.

As he was borne swiftly over the hard smooth road that ran along the top of the hill, and from which occasional glimpses of the river smiling under the sun could be seen, he wondered if after his interview with the old lawyer he could not find an excuse to call upon his employer. Dick was too frank to deceive himself with the idea that a call was necessary, but he thought that under such excuse he might be able to see Bessie. He was in that frame of mind, when he condemned himself for an idiot for fluttering like a moth about the candle flame, but he thought that if he was singing his wings, after all he was getting a good deal of pleasure out of the pursuit, even if it was accompanied with the pain of the uncertainty as to whether or not his ardency was returned.

The young gentleman had a very fair appreciation of his own graces of person and mind, and his self-esteem was not of such modest dimensions as permitted him to admit that he was not a goodly mate for any beauty, but he was, withal, clear-headed and worldly wise, and he knew very well he was not included in the category of eligible young men, and he feared that however much pleasure Bessie might derive from surreptitious flirtations with him, she still had been trained in the idea that in the serious affairs of the heart she must direct her eyes to one who would bring more wealth and position than he could, at all

events for many years to come. Yet a complete realization of the bar which existed between them did not prevent him from seizing every opportunity to throw himself into Bessie Hetlow's society. The truth of it was that he was in love with the fair young girl—in love with herself, apart from any consideration of the worldly advantages of such a match.

These thoughts occupied his mind until the carriage stopped in front of the residence of Mr. Stanton and he was compelled to alight. Handing his card to a servant who responded to his ring, he was ushered into a small apartment near the door and here he was left to himself for some time. Finally, there came to him a middle-aged lady, who informed him that her husband was absent, but was expected home momentarily. She asked him to remain, yet suggested, and, as Mason thought, with a curious mixture of eagerness and timidity, that she might, perhaps, be able to serve him.

Dick replied that he did not think she could, as his business must necessarily be with Mr. Stanton on a matter she could not be expected to have any knowledge of. Why so polite and guarded a response should have produced the effect it did, Dick could not determine, but he observed with a great deal of surprise that the lady became the prey to repressed excitement and that her voice fairly trembled as she asked:

“Is it a matter which concerns Mr. Stanton?”

Dick was so much surprised at the eagerness with which she asked the question, that he hesitated in replying, and the lady repeated it with an appearance of increased alarm. Then he hastened to assure her that it did not. An expression of disappointment swept over her face as she fell into a brown study, and Dick began to feel that he had happened upon the lawyer in an inopportune moment, in that it was a

period of some domestic distress. The lady emerged from her brown study with a sudden question.

"Is he in any trouble?"

"Who, your husband?" asked Dick.

"Yes?" most eagerly.

"Not that I am aware of," replied Dick.

She was silent again for a few moments, her hand playing in a curious fluttering way from her lap to the side of her dress. Again she propelled a sudden question at him.

"Do you come to make trouble for him?"

"No. Certainly not."

Mrs. Stanton cast a look of deep incredulity upon him as she rose, begging to be excused, and crossed the wide hall, into a room directly opposite, and as she did so, Dick saw her draw something from her pocket which looked like a pack of playing cards. As Dick could see by looking into the mirror in the room, she seated herself at the table and began a hasty distribution of the cards into small piles upon it, and then, picking up each pile, hastily ran them over in her hands, poring intently over them. Having run over each one of the piles, she gathered them together with the air and gesture of one who had arrived at a satisfactory conclusion, which had convinced her as to her course. She returned hastily, before Dick could imagine what her action meant.

"Who is the woman?" she demanded, standing immediately in front of him.

"The woman, madam?" asked Dick, thoroughly mystified. "I know of no woman."

"It is a heart woman," she continued most positively. "There is no doubt about it. You cannot conceal it from me. I knew trouble was coming. I dreamed so last night. It is a woman with yellow hair and blue eyes. I saw it clearly in the cards."

Dick stared at her stupidly and began to believe

that some demented creature had escaped her keeper.

"I am sure, madam," he replied, in a tone intended to soothe her, "I do not understand you."

"Is she anything to you? Sister? Or wife?" she persisted.

"Madam, you will certainly have to be plainer with me before I can understand you."

"I know you have come to see Mr. Stanton about a woman. It is true. I have tested it and I know. Perhaps you and I can settle the trouble."

"You are wholly mistaken," said the wondering Dick, thinking that Mr. Stanton was either a very improper person or else a very much younger man than he had supposed him to be. "I came to make inquiries as to a young man who, I suppose, was in the employ of Mr. Stanton twenty-five years ago. My name is Mason, and I am in the employ of your neighbor Mr. Hetlow."

"Oh, indeed!" she cried, her manner changing instantly. "Are you that Mr. Mason? I've heard Wallis speak of you. Nevertheless I know it will come. I look for it every day. It is terrible, this dread and suspense."

Before Dick could ask what was terrible, a heavy footfall was heard in the hall. Mrs. Stanton went to the door and said to someone outside:

"There is a gentleman to see you, pa."

She returned to her seat, followed by a man certainly not less than sixty, spare in frame, and severe in expression, whose whole appearance suggested rigidity, principles, and rules. One less likely to be an object of jealousy upon the part of his wife, Dick could not possibly imagine, and therefore he concluded that Mrs. Stanton was slightly deranged.

Dick was treated politely, and he plunged into his business at once.

"Mr. Stanton," he said, "I have come from New York in pursuit of information and beg to ask a question, by the answer to which I can tell at once whether I need to further trouble you in the matter."

Mrs. Stanton leaned forward in intense interest, her lips parted in her eagerness, and her eyes fixed upon her husband. Mr. Stanton hesitated before he replied, pursing up his lips, and wrinkling his brow.

"Proceed, sir," he said, after a moment's thought, "but I reserve the right to answer or not as I see fit."

"Of course! of course," muttered Mrs. Stanton loud enough for both to hear, and in a tone which indicated her intense appreciation of her husband's cunning.

Mr. Stanton turned to her and said sharply, "Now don't be silly."

"The right to answer or not," said Dick courteously, "cannot be denied by me, of course. The question is this. Did you ever have in your employ a man named Dugdale?"

"Why, yes," answered the lawyer promptly, "but it was some twenty-five or six years ago."

"That is as I understand it," said Dick.

"But what is the meaning of this inquiry at this late day?"

"It is the first step in a search for the son of Edmund Dugdale, I am commissioned to make by my employer Mr. Hetlow, your neighbor."

"Hetlow!" said Mr. Stanton, "why the deuce did he not ask me himself?"

"I presume," said Dick, "that he was not aware you ever knew Edmund Dugdale. I came to suppose so, by learning that a lawyer of the name of Stanton employed him in 1855, and search revealed to me that of all of that name at the bar in that year, still alive and practicing in 1883, you are the only one. So I began with you."

"I see," said Mr. Stanton. "I employed Dugdale and discharged him under an accusation I subsequently learned did him wrong, and I sought to repair my error, but I was too late. He was dying when I went to see him and so I buried him as the best thing I could do. But I have no knowledge of a child."

"Probably," said Dick. "We know his child disappeared several days before his death. My object in calling upon you, was to ask if you could tell me something of the surroundings of Edmund Dugdale."

By this time Mrs. Stanton lost interest in the conversation, and made an excuse to retire.

"I knew nothing about Dugdale when he came to me," said Mr. Stanton, taking up the dialogue after Mrs. Stanton went out. "He wrote an excellent hand, and that was his sole recommendation. I came to believe he had been unfortunate, had not been accustomed to earning his living, and had seen more prosperous days than those he had fallen on with me. But he never talked of himself, nor did I ask him any questions."

"Did you know anyone who knew him in those days?"

"No," replied Mr. Stanton indifferently.

Dick thought he would have to enlist the old man's interest by telling him the tale of the fortune begging for an heir, since he seemed so indifferent, so he said:

"Edmund Dugdale's son is the heir to a great fortune. I do not presume Mr. Hetlow desires wide publicity of the affair, but so distinguished a lawyer as you are, and one having such wide experience, is accustomed to holding great secrets, and I am quite sure I will not go astray in telling you the story."

Whereupon he told it all as he had received it from Mr. Hetlow and as he had gathered it from the written reports made by Samuel Dugdale's clerk to his employer. He had the satisfaction of seeing that he had

thoroughly aroused the old man's interest by the time he had finished.

"I know something about this," he said. "That clerk of Samuel Dugdale's you speak of, came to see me. But he was a thick-witted fellow and undertook to lecture me upon what he called my presumption in daring to discharge Samuel Dugdale's son—as if I cared for, or knew of, Samuel Dugdale. I drove him from the office. But he said nothing about a child of Edmund."

He thought a long time.

"Dugdale was living in MacDougall Street in a single room under the roof, with a family from whom he hired the room, when I went to see him," he continued. "He only lodged there. Several days after I learned the truth about the papers I thought he had sold, and while I was thinking what I could do to repair the wrong I had done him, the man in whose house he was living came to me, to say Dugdale was very ill, and in great distress. I went immediately, but he was dying when I reached him—very weak, and did, in fact, die while I was there—from starvation, I thought then and do yet. I buried him. But I cannot for the life of me remember the man's name in whose house he had the room. Possibly I have it among my papers of the year 1856 or 1857. I will see to-morrow. But at all events I can go direct to the house."

"After so many years?" asked Dick incredulously.

"After so many years," replied Mr. Stanton positively. "My memory for localities never fails me; for names and figures it does. However, I passed through MacDougall Street about a year ago, and the whole Dugdale incident was recalled to me by recognizing the house."

"Then we may be able to learn something if we can trace back the tenants," said Dick hopefully.

"I can help you in this, for my experience in searching titles of property will be of value to you. I will go to town with you to-morrow. You say you are in the employ of neighbor Hetlow?"

Dick replied he was.

"Your name is Mason, you say?" pursued the old man.

"Yes," replied Dick.

"Anything to Thomas Mason who was once in the shipping business in New York?"

"A nephew, and adopted by him," replied Dick.

"I knew him. Was his counsel in his business days. He adopted you to inherit his property. But you didn't inherit anything, did you?"

Dick could not refrain from laughing over the blunt directness of the old lawyer, as he replied:

"No, sir; Uncle Thomas—father as I called him—died practically without property."

"I know all about it," said Mr. Stanton. "I managed to save a little for the widow—very little—enough to keep her—if she didn't live too long. Is she alive or dead?"

"Dead, sir," replied Dick. "She died two years ago. She lived long enough for me to show in a practical way that I was grateful for the kindness she and Uncle Tom had shown an orphan from his babyhood."

"Her money gave out before she died then?"

"Yes, sir, but I was earning some."

"Good boy! Good boy! I suppose you will stop with Hetlow to-night?"

"No," replied Dick, with a peculiar smile, "I shall not. I will call upon him, for I think he should know that his neighbor holds the key to our future progress. But since you will go to town with me to-morrow, I will stop in the village overnight."

"No, you shan't do that. You shall stop here.

**Go over and make your call, and be back at sharp six.
I don't like to wait for my meals."**

Dick yielded, and went over to the Hetlow house by a short cut, pointed out from the piazza by Mr. Stanton.

CHAPTER IV.

A GOOD FRIEND.

THE path called by Mr. Stanton the short cut was well worn, and Dick found little trouble in following it. He had never visited the country-place of Mr. Hetlow. Having received a delicate and well guarded hint, in the past, that it was hardly the proper thing for a clerk to seek to enter his employer's house upon terms of social equality, and which, in his conceit, he had attributed to a desire to separate him from Bessie, Dick determined he would make the call with all the ceremony he could. To reach the main entrance he was compelled to follow the paths which led by the south elevation of the dwelling and past the windows of the apartments dedicated to the occupancy of the daughter of the house. It so happened that at the exact moment he was passing, the daughter of the house was gazing from the window in gloomy discontent. It was with sensations she could not have analyzed had she tried, that she recognized Dick's manly form, following the winding paths the landscape gardener, with strict adherence to the Hogarthian rule, had laid down. As a matter of fact she did not stop to analyze them but hurried out to determine whether he had had the audacity to seek her in so bold a way.

What she did learn was that Dick asked for her father as he was turned into the reception room, and she heard the servant reply that he would see whether Mr. Hetlow was in the house. She knew her father

would not be in for an hour, and, by a quick flank movement she intercepted the servant so that she could receive the card and thus have an excuse for going to Dick.

Dick was not unprepared for her appearance. So strong was the hope that accident might favor him, that he persuaded himself it would, and he recognized the swish of her skirts as she came up the hall. But he was not prepared for the manner of his reception—for the studied air of dignity and coldness with which she greeted him.

The last time he had seen her, barely a week previous, she had been gracious, and he tender. The idea crossed his mind that she thought he had been too tender and was now resenting it. She waved him to a seat and sank into another upon the opposite side of the room.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Mason," she said coldly. "I supposed, at this time of the year, gentlemen were confined to the city by business."

Dick thought he detected something in the speech, indicating that it had been purposely left incomplete and would be finished only by the words "especially when they are clerks."

Being a young man of spirit he resented the implied significance and replied with equal dignity and coldness:

"True. Gentlemen engaged in business—especially when they are clerks—have not freedom at this time of the year."

Haughtiness was not Bessie's intention. She thought the readiness with which Dick had been willing to undertake the search for a young man, who, if found, would make the Dugdale fortune impossible to her, argued an indifference to her interests quite remote from his protestations, and she wanted to make him feel that she resented the difference between his acts and his professions. But now she in her turn

took umbrage at the significance with which he had invested her little speech and the proud humility with which he had reminded her he was her father's clerk.

The two young people had begun badly, and she was compelled to make an effort before she could reply, with apparent indifference:

"You are more fortunate than the rest."

"You are mistaken," he replied coldly. "I am here on business—to see your father upon a matter I have in charge from him."

"Ah, yes," she said, "I had forgotten. Father will soon return. It must be tiresome, this search. Will you find the young man?"

The art with which she seemed to make an effort to conceal her weariness was delicious. Dick was startled by her question. He thought Mr. Hetlow would not tell Bessie until the search had ended. He showed his confusion and she, noting it, enjoyed it.

"Your father then has told you?" he asked quite stupidly.

"Why should he not? He is interested in his daughter's prospects, if other people are not."

This was said with head bent over the fan at which she was picking, but from the corners of her eyes she was keenly observing the effect of the thrust.

"Yes," she continued, "he has told me, and that you are commissioned to make the search for the missing young man. I hope it is progressing."

"It is barely begun," he replied, now keenly alive to the fact that she was resenting the making of the search, though he could not realize that it was only because he was making it.

"Oh! Have you prospects of success?"

"Success? Please explain. It might be success to fail, failure to succeed."

This was too enigmatical to please the young lady, nor was she pleased either with the tone in which it was

said nor the smile accompanying it. Dick, finding he had confused her, felt decidedly better and ventured another remark.

"It is not a question of success or failure with me."

"No," she quickly replied; "a matter of indifference as to the consequence."

Dick stared at her, and continued:

"I am directed by your father to make an energetic search for the young man and I do it, as I hope I do other things falling to my duty, with all the ability I can command."

"Without regard to friend or foe," she said.

Dick bowed in acquiescence.

"Yes, I suppose that is the chivalry of the nineteenth century. One may sometimes regret one falls upon such coldly civilized times," she replied.

Dick, stung by her manner, proceeded in a manlike fashion to blunder. He thought she was annoyed because any search at all was being made, and he wondered why a girl, who already had all the money she could require, could show such desire for more. Under the influence of this thought, he said:

"If the young man lives the fortune should be his, and justice, as your father sees it, demands it should be given him."

The young lady straightened up, bent a look upon him sharp and angry, and rose to her feet.

"You are insolent," she said.

"If I am, I crave your pardon. Such was not my intent."

"You seek to rebuke," she replied.

Dick had risen from his chair, not a little alarmed at the effect produced by his words, which were rather the expression of his thoughts than a speech addressed to her. With a low bow, he answered:

"I cannot so far forget myself as to attempt to rebuke the daughter of Howard Hetlow."

Bessie was now thoroughly angry. Why would he so persistently force on her the fact that he was her father's clerk.

"Why don't you add 'my employer?'" she demanded angrily.

"My employer," obediently added Dick.

This prompt compliance did not mend matters. With a contemptuous ejaculation she walked to the other end of the room, turned, swept to the window, through which she gazed a moment. Suddenly she faced him.

"I do not know why I should be insulted in my own house."

Dick was no less angry than she, but he was under better control. And it needed all his self-control to repress the angry retort which leaped to his lips. He held his peace, looking sternly at her. When he did reply it was with a dignity of manner and an emphasis of tone which challenged her admiration, angry as she was.

"Miss Hetlow," he said. "When you have time to review this conversation, you will acquit me of any insult, or attempt at insult."

"You charge me with wishing to seize this property whether I have a right to it or not," she replied hotly.

"I am not aware that any words spoken by me this afternoon can be so construed," he answered firmly.

"If your words did not convey that meaning your manner did," she replied sharply. "And that has been most offensive."

Dick was very irritating. He was so calmly superior, and so entirely polite, that he evaded the coming to close quarters she so much desired, and therefore she determined to force the war.

"Do you suppose I want these millions?" she asked. "That I long for them? Dream of them of nights and hug the idea of their possession with pleasure by day?"

that I so desire them that I would deprive the rightful owner?"

"God forbid," answered Dick fervently.

"Answer me?" she demanded. "Am I so mercenary, so avaricious, that you think I would commit crime to obtain them? Is that your opinion of me?"

"I do not think you are either mercenary or avaricious——"

He stopped short, holding his voice in suspense, not as if he had ended a sentence, but rather as if he had suddenly checked himself, and endeavored to appear as if he completed it.

"But what, sir?" she demanded imperiously. "You are not frank. Finish your sentence, please."

"I was about to add that I could quite well understand that a young lady, dazzled by the sudden vision of almost boundless wealth, could, without being charged with being mercenary or avaricious, desire that events should turn in her favor."

"Oh," she said, with an evident sneer, "you are lenient in your opinions of our sex. I have no desire for that fortune. Do you believe it? It is true. Never, from the moment my father revealed the possibilities, have I desired its possession. And I hope from the bottom of my heart you will find the young man Dugdale."

Never in all her life, thought Dick, was she ever so admirable as then, when with flashing eyes and heightened color, she stood erect before him, repelling the imputation she perversely attributed to him. Perhaps she perceived his very evident admiration, for the color deepened in her face, as she said:

"However, this fortune has served to show me my fair-weather friends."

She waited for a reply, and so Dick said:

"I am afraid I do not comprehend that remark."

She bent a look of deep scorn upon him and said:

"Look for its meaning in your own readiness to undertake a search which, if successful, will deprive me of Samuel Dugdale's money."

She swept him a deep courtesy, and after saying that her father's presence would not be long delayed, marched with stately tread out of the room.

Dick stared after her utterly dumfounded and completely mystified by the contradiction involved by her parting shot. He sat himself down, but thought that after the scene with the daughter he did not care to see the father, and so he left the house. He went back to the Stanton residence by the path he had come, past the windows of the apartments of the daughter of the house, but this time the daughter of the house was not gazing from the windows; she was lying upon a sofa, her head buried in her arms, and her breast torn and heaving with sobs.

The Stanton family was awaiting him, and when he was presented to Wallis, he was claimed as an old acquaintance by that young lady, since they had met more than once in the city. During the meal he was distracted and could only with difficulty bear his part in the conversation—a fact which did not escape the keen observation of Miss Gladwin. When they rose from the table, Wallis insisted upon taking Dick for a stroll about the grounds before darkness fell.

"You were received by my aunt, I think," said Wallis, as they strolled about.

"Yes, Mrs. Stanton kindly met me," replied Dick, not quite certain whether Wallis was making an effort to learn the nature of that reception.

"She thought she could serve you quite as well as uncle?"

"She said perhaps she could," replied Dick diplomatically.

"And was quite anxious to know the nature of the business you had with uncle," persisted Wallis.

"She manifested some curiosity as to it," replied Dick again gravely.

By this time he perceived that Wallis was vainly endeavoring to repress her laughter.

"Poor aunt! She is desolated to-night for fear she made an exhibition of herself, and, wanting sympathy, confided all to me."

She broke into a hearty peal of laughter in which Dick joined from sheer sympathy, so contagious was it.

"I think I shall go into convulsions when I picture to myself poor aunt's demands, and your bewilderment. It is just too funny for anything. Poor aunt! She is absurdly jealous of uncle and not the slightest cause exists for it. She loves him so much herself that she thinks everyone else must see him as she does. You must know, she is the best soul in the world, but she is a firm believer in dreams and fortune-telling by the cards, and when she thought you were not telling her the truth, she says she went into another room and drew the cards that told her you had called about a heart woman who was associated with uncle, and last night she had had a dream that foretold it."

"I saw her go into the other room and do something with the cards," said Dick, highly amused.

"Oh, that is too good," laughed Wallis again. "She thinks you did not."

Wallis was again convulsed with laughter, and Dick, now comprehending the whole of the strange scene, laughed heartily with her. But Wallis turned suddenly on him.

"You must not laugh at her; it is her only weakness and is lost sight of in her many excellences. Did you call upon Mr. Hetlow this afternoon?"

"Yes," briefly replied Dick, becoming suddenly sober.

"Did you see him?"

“No.”

“You are not responsive at all. Who did you see?”

“Miss Hetlow.”

“That was pleasant. She was agreeable as she always is, of course?”

“She was somewhat singular in her manner, I thought,” replied the cautious Dick.

“In what way?”

“Very cold and haughty.”

Wallis looked at him very sharply, and then said with an abruptness that startled Dick:

“Mr. Mason, I said the other day that I was your friend and meant that you should know it. And I am, too.”

“Thank you,” said Dick, smiling. “I accept the friendship and pledge mine in return.”

“Now that’s nice, and I will be your good friend. Do you know why I am?”

“I suppose I have been fortunate enough to impress myself favorably upon you.”

“Poh! Conceited like all the rest of the men. No! Because you are like me—poor.”

“Oh!”

“Yes. I have a great sympathy for poor young men—a great deal more than I have for poor young girls.”

“I should think it would be quite the other way.”

“Certainly not. A poor girl can marry a rich young man. They are easily caught. I shall do it when the time comes. Any girl can learn how. But a poor young man is so abominably proud—that is if he is worth having—so disgustingly proud that he will not sue for the hand of a rich girl, lest he be called a fortune hunter. That’s why he is an object of sympathy. He actually compels a rich girl to make love to him or go without him. You have had a row with Bess.”

The suddenness with which she arrived at this exact

truth fairly took his breath away, and not knowing how to reply, he said nothing. This did not prevent the vivacious Wallis from demanding to know all that had occurred, and by dint of questioning and guessing she finally obtained a circumstantial account of the episode, which involved the telling of the tale of the Dugdale millions. When she had learned all, she was silently thoughtful. Finally she said:

“I did not think you could be so stupid.”

Somewhat offended, Dick replied.

“I am noted for my density and it serves me well now, for I do not understand you.”

“You ought to have seen at once that this great promise of money had not altered her one whit.”

“She did show a great change of manner nevertheless.”

“Why, you are a perfect ninny! Can you not see what it was all due to?”

“I am very dense, you know; but I do not know, unless she is angry with me because I am trying to find a man, who, if found, deprives her of a fortune.”

“Precisely.”

“Well, then I am not such a ninny after all.”

“Yes, you are. It isn’t the possible loss of the money. You have been friends. You have shown each other that you liked each other, if nothing more. She thinks however that at the first request, without any thought of her, whether it will serve her or not, you go out on that search. It is your willingness to do that which the world would call an unfriendly act. She expected you to say, ‘Let some one else do this.’ ”

A glimmering of light broke upon the horizon of Dick.

“Oh, I see.”

“Of course you do when you are told.”

“But she is quite right,” said Dick. “I don’t want her to have the fortune.”

“Now why, for Heaven’s sake!”

"Because—because I fear the effect so much money will have on her nature, and—"

"And what?"

"You say you are my friend. I will confess to you. I'm desperately in love with Miss Hetlow, and the more money she has, the further out of my reach she goes. It's downright selfish, I know—wretchedly selfish if you will have it, but there it is; and I'll break my back to find that Dugdale."

"You're a duck of a man. Leave it to me; I'll clear the atmosphere. Let us go into the house. Uncle will be growing impatient and must be tired by this time of the beautiful blonde in the red shawl."

Dick suffered himself to be led back, feeling strangely happy without quite knowing why.

CHAPTER V.

SIGNOR BARBERINI.

IN the seclusion of the room assigned him as a sleeping apartment, Dick reviewed the events of the day.

The singular attitude of Bessie toward him engrossed much of his thought. Beside an open window in an easy-chair *en déshabille*, with lighted cigar, he endeavored to reason to a determination. After his talk with Wallis, he had experienced a sensation of elation. Upon consideration, however, that sensation faded away. He could not bring himself to a belief that Wallis's interpretation of Bessie's strange manner and conduct was the true one. He recalled Bessie's words, manner, and expression, and tried to square them with the meaning Wallis put upon them and failed. The trouble was he sought to judge Bessie's treatment of himself by masculine standards. Result—a muddle and a fixed error.

If, he argued, Bessie were angry with him because he had undertaken the search, for the reason Wallis gave, why did she not say so directly, and charge him openly with unfriendliness. As if a bludgeon was a woman's weapon! He would have done so had their positions been reversed, was his blundering conclusion.

With that fatuity of a man who had never been tested and tried by the close associations with the subtleties and indirections of the feminine mind, he satisfied himself that there were too many irreconcilable points, for him to accept Wallis's interpretation. **If she were angry with him only because she thought**

he failed in devotion to her, why did she so persistently show him the difference between her father's daughter and her father's clerk? If she was fond of him why did she say so many cutting and contemptuous things? Why, if she felt the fondness for him Wallis insisted, did she seek to wound him? It was not the way of the world for people to hurt those of whom they were fond. The truth was, and he regretted he was forced to the conclusion, that the possibility of so much wealth had inflamed Bessie's imagination, and opened up to her visions of a brilliant existence, in ranks of life not before entertained in her dreams, and while under their early influence, she had seized the first opportunity to make clear to him, the gulf which existed between a struggling clerk and an heiress to untold millions. So he threw his cigar away and went to bed, very sore and unhappy.

Mr. Stanton accompanied Dick to the city the next morning. When they parted on arrival, the old lawyer set out upon the task of finding the name of the tenant of the MacDougall Street house at the time of Edmund Dugdale's death, and Dick went to his office in Cliff Street.

On entering, the first object to meet his eyes was a shabbily dressed old man, whose appearance advertised his want of prosperity. A clerk informed Dick that the stranger wanted to see him. Wondering what so disreputable an old person could want with him, Dick asked his visitor his business.

"I wish to see Mr. Richard Mason," said the old man rising, and removing his hat with an attempt at jauntiness which struck Dick as oddly incongruous.

Assuring him that he saw what he wished to see, Dick again asked him his business.

The old man, reseating himself and laying his battered hat carefully upon the floor with his walking stick over it, deliberately took from an inner pocket a

wallet, which he opened with trembling fingers. After fumbling over a number of well worn and dirty papers he extracted a slip cut from a newspaper, which he extended to Dick, asking:

"Are you the gentleman as put that into the newspapers?"

It was the advertisement asking for communication with anyone having knowledge of Edmund Dugdale.

"Yes," Dick answered, with a sudden increase of interest in the old man. "Have you any knowledge of Dugdale?"

"I knew him when he was alive."

"I want to know all I can learn of him," said Dick, as he drew up a chair, and seated himself beside his visitor.

"For what purpose," asked the old man, turning shrewd eyes upon Dick.

To reveal his purpose was not Dick's intention, yet he could not let the first chance for obtaining the knowledge he sought that presented itself slip from him. A rapid survey of the old man's appearance determined his course, so he said imperiously:

"My purpose is my own. I want to know the life led by Edmund Dugdale and the names of the people with whom he associated in this city. If you have such knowledge I will pay for it. If you have not, you have no wares to sell me."

Laughing slyly to himself, as if well pleased with his own shrewdness, while his hand played over his chin, white with a stubble growth of many days, the old man answered:

"I can hit it close. It's about the money left by Samuel Dugdale, the great Lunnon merchant."

Startled by the answer Dick showed his surprise, to the great amusement of the old man.

"Oh!" he cried, "then you know something as to the antecedents of Dugdale?"

"A little, a little," replied the old man, with an air

of importance, as he settled himself more comfortably in his chair. "I knew him in Lunnon and New York—when he was rich and gay in Lunnon, and poor and miserable in New York. I will tell all I know. I am a poor man and will leave it to your generosity to say what value my information is to you."

Dick assured him that he would be paid in proportion to the value of his communication, and that in any event, he would be remunerated for his trouble in calling. The old man settled himself for a long tale—and long it was, filled largely with personal reminiscences. The facts however were few.

The old man's name was Edward Barber. He had been ballet-master at the Drury Lane Theater in London, where he was professionally known as Signor Barberini. In the corps over which he presided was Loie Weller, whom Edmund Dugdale had married. Signor Barberini had afterward come to New York in connection with the Italian Opera. And here he had again renewed acquaintance with Dugdale, through the latter's wife, who had applied to him for a place in the ballet, since her wages were necessary for the support of herself and husband. After Barber had been taken sick, stricken with paralysis, Mrs. Dugdale had been very kind to him. When he recovered he went to another city and, returning after a year's absence, found Mrs. Dugdale dead, and Edmund struggling as best he could with his child, morose and despairing, refusing to apply to his father for assistance. Barber had helped him then, and again had left the city for a long period, and when he returned Dugdale was dead. He supposed the child had been adopted by someone, since Edmund had talked a great deal about finding a good home for it and then putting an end to himself.

"Did you know the name of the person with whom he lodged?" asked Dick, when the old man had concluded the long and rambling tale.

"No, I don't believe I ever knew."

"Do you recollect the name of any of Edmund's associates, or of his wife, in those days?"

"They hadn't any. Edmund kept very much to himself, and his wife—stop!" he exclaimed, interrupting himself. "There was one—a woman—Jennie Crandall. I brought her from Lunnon to look after the costumes. Loie, that is Mrs. Dugdale, knew her in the ballet in Lunnon. They were friends."

"What has become of her?"

"I dunno. I've lost sight of her. She married a stage carpenter named Tomlinson, and he kept an ale house in Brooklyn the last I heard of him."

"She is not dead, then?"

"That I don't know, sir. But I think I can find out."

"Do so," said Dick rising, "and bring me the information as soon as you can. Here is twenty dollars for what you have told me, and if you can find Mrs. Tomlinson and take me to her, there will be more pay."

Highly satisfied, the old man shuffled away.

Many moons had waxed and waned since he had earned twenty dollars in one sum. His first impulse on gaining the street was to set out immediately in search of Mrs. Tomlinson, but reflection deterred him—indeed sent him in an entirely different direction. He thought that a too prompt finding of the woman would cheapen his services, but that which was influential was purely of a personal nature.

For several years Signor Barberini had frequented a certain drinking place on a certain Sixth Avenue corner, where his direct custom was inconsiderable, but, since he was always willing to accept an invitation to drink, and to entertain paying customers with anecdotes of theatrical and operatic personages, a large fund of which he possessed, his indirect custom made him a tolerated lounger. Suddenly possessed of a

sum of money larger than he had hoped for, with brilliant promises of more to be earned as easily, he concluded that, without doing violence to his service to Mr. Mason, he could indulge in the pleasure, now rare to him, of appearing before the barkeeper of the place he affected, and the regular frequenters thereof, as a capitalist, and thus regain some of that respect, which he was forced to admit was lost to him through his inability to buy even his morning cup.

Poets may call money dross, and moralists may call it the root of all evil, but nevertheless the average man with a few dollars in his pocket enjoys a sense of dignity utterly wanting when his pockets are empty. The ex-ballet-master was an average man, and on this particular day when he entered the drinking-place, there was such dignified independence, almost touching haughtiness in his manner, as he walked across the saloon, that the barkeeper regarded him with astonishment, to the old man's secret delight. He made his way to the rear of the room and seated himself at a table. Two men were already seated at this table, who, by their manner and their neglect in returning his salutation, plainly showed that his companionship was not welcome. But so positive was the ex-ballet-master that he carried with him the charm to open the doors to their favor that he refused to observe their coldness, and having heaved a sigh, indicating that rest after labor was most comfortable, said:

"I have been downtown on business—a long jaunt for an old man. A draft of good old gin would rest me. Will you join?"

The two men were at no pains to conceal their surprise, but it was not so great as to prevent them from promptly accepting the invitation. The Signor—"Teddy," as he was called there—did not resent the openly expressed surprise, which he did not fail to observe, but with the air of a patron summoned the waiter to receive the orders.

His companions at the table were most dissimilar.

One was possibly forty or forty-five. His face, clean shaven, presented a singular blending of force and cunning, acuteness and subtlety, cruelty and character. His eyes bore a shifty and haunted expression, and had a curious trick of dropping before one's gaze, and stealthily lifting to look; his nose was broad on top and pinched at the nostrils; his lips were thin and the lines of his mouth ragged; his chin sharp and pointed, though his jaw was square and angular; when his hat was off, a large, broad forehead, over which the skin was tightly drawn, out of all proportion to the rest of his face, was seen, and there was a strange depression on the top of his head. His face was not attractive. His hands were noticeable—long, white, slender hands, with tapering fingers, withal strong muscular hands, but the most noticeable of all, was his voice—soft, low, and gentle in tones. He was respectably clad in black. Rumor said he was a gambler, but as to that no one about the drinking-place was certain.

The other was his junior by fifteen or twenty years. His appearance at first glance suggested that he was better than his surroundings—that he was accustomed to something above a Sixth Avenue barroom. He wore clothes in good taste, and modest colors of the latest fashion, with the air of one who was accustomed to them. Of easy manners, with handsome face, well knit and graceful figure, there was a certain persistent suggestion of a lost refinement. Notwithstanding all this, the man of the world would have preferred to have withheld than to have given confidence to this young man. He too had the same shifty, haunted expression in his eyes, and in addition an alertness which apparently took the form of constant suspicion always on guard.

Evidently in his old age Signor Barberini was not choice as to his associates.

"It is wonderful," remarked Barber, in a meditative tone, after he had done the honors and sipped of his gin and water, "how things half forgotten come up."

The other two, evidently believing that they were to be treated to one of his tales of the theater, all of which they had heard, were indifferent to the remark. Without heeding the yawn with which the younger man treated his beginning, he pulled before him a copy of the daily paper lying on the table and searching it for a while, finally pushed it before the younger man with his finger designating a certain advertisement.

"Read it, Bob," softly demanded the older man.

With a facility showing that he was not wholly without educational training, the young man obeyed.

"'Anyone,'" he read, "'having information concerning Edmund Dugdale, who came from England to New York City in 1855, and who lived in MacDougall Street in 1857, and was in that year employed in the business office of the *Courier and Inquirer*, or who knew him in those years, will confer a favor, by communicating with Richard Mason, at the office of Hetlow, Altmount & Co., No.—— Cliff Street.'"

The elder of the two looked keenly at the old man for a brief instant, and then said softly:

"I knew him."

Barber regarded the speaker with severe displeasure.

"How long ago?" he asked, incredulity in his tones.

"I was a kid, and employed in that newspaper office."

"Oh, you were," replied Barber sarcastically. "What did you know about him?"

"Very little; nothing in fact."

"I thought so," remarked the old man, much mollified. "Well, I knew him well. What do you suppose that means?"

"Blessed if I know," answered the younger man, perceiving the other, who was stealthily watching the old man from under his brows, made no remark.

"'Millions,'" said the ex-ballet-master unctuously. "Millions upon millions."

"What means millions?" asked the younger man contemptuously. "That 'ad'?"

"Just that advertisement," answered the old man impressively, proud that he had something to say which enlisted the interest of the two men, accustomed to treat him and his remarks with contempt. "I knew Edmund Dugdale when he was the gayest young man in Lunnon, making the sovereigns spin in a way to set your head in a whirl; I knew him when he married a girl in the ballet, and when he was kicked out for it by his father, the richest merchant in England. Rich! Talk about Vanderbilt's money—why, Edmund Dugdale's father thirty years ago could have bought and sold three Vanderbilts."

"Bah," cried the younger man in supreme disgust. "What's this you are giving us?"

"The truth. And yet Edmund Dugdale died in this city for want of food, as his wife died before him."

"What has all this to do with this 'ad'?" inquired the young man.

"Everything. Samuel Dugdale's great fortune is going a-begging. Six months ago I was reading in a Lunnon paper that Samuel Dugdale was dead, and it went on to say that the business had descended from father and son for near on to two hundred years, but now the only son of Dugdale having died in America, the business and the great fortune would go to a different branch of the family."

The younger man, tired of the tale, shifted his position in his chair. As he did so he caught a darting look from the other, accompanied by a sudden uplifting of the heavy brows. He turned to Barber and said impatiently:

"Well?"

"Well," continued the old ballet-master, "here comes the advertisement I showed you."

"You say the son died here in New York?"

"Yes, in 1857."

"I suppose they are trying to establish his death for a certainty, so the heirs can take the property."

"Not a bit of it. Edmund Dugdale left a son."

"Is he dead too?"

"That is what the advertisement means. No one knows. Nine days before Edmund's death the son disappeared. Where? No one knows."

"Stolen?"

"No, I believe put out for adoption. I've got good reasons for supposing so."

"And this is an attempt to find the child, alive or dead."

"That's it precisely. There's millions for the son if he is found and big money for the man that finds him."

"How old was the child when the father died?"

"Two years old."

"I suppose you are going to find the child and make the big money."

Although by this time Barber had imbibed frequently, his cunning had not deserted him. Perhaps the younger man's inartistic yawn, so evidently an affectation of weariness, warned him that he was being drawn into telling all he knew.

"Me?" he cried. "How can I find him? It is a quarter of a century ago, and Edmund Dugdale never told anyone where he put the child. There's no tracing the real heir."

The elder man got up and lounged out of the side door. The younger one argued with Barber upon the possibility of finding the missing heir.

The elder man lounged back presently and dropped into his chair. Then he treated to drinks not once, but two or three times.

By and by, the old ballet-master struggled to his feet and, somewhat unsteady on his legs, went out,

saying he had business across town. After he had gone, the elder man got up and again lounged to the door, watching Barber as he slowly walked up the street. At the same time, a man emerged from behind the coal-box of a grocery on the opposite corner and went up the street, taking the same direction as did Barber. The elder man lounged back to the table.

"The old fellow is flush to-day," he said to the young man.

"Yes," was the reply; "been staked for what he knew about Dugdale."

"He knew more than he told us," said the elder man.

"Do you think so?" inquired the other with interest.

"I do. Who is Richard Mason?"

"I don't know."

"Find out right away."

Obediently the young man rose and went out of the front door. In the meantime Barber pursued his way across town, took the elevated cars downtown, got out at Fulton Street and crossed to Brooklyn. By a singular coincidence the man who had stepped out from behind the coal-box of the grocery store had business also in Brooklyn and crossed on the same boat with Barber.

CHAPTER VI.

A TALE AND A DISCOVERY.

THE directness with which the disreputable old person had arrived at the purpose lying back of the search did not please Dick. He feared Barber would endeavor to engraft himself upon the enterprise, for evidently he expected profit to arise out of his knowledge. Dick would have been less pleased had he known that the old dancer, with a view to further payments, had concealed several essential points: one that Dugdale had informed him of his relationship to Mr. Hetlow; another that from time to time, both before and after Dugdale's death, Mrs. Tomlinson had cared for the child, and still another that the child had been adopted by some person. The old ballet-master was not a vicious person, but his necessities drove him hard and his mind was filled with visions of a great fortune, a small portion of which he thought he could divert to himself.

On the afternoon of the day Barber had called on Dick, a letter arrived for the latter, which however was not received by him until the following morning. It was from the lawyer, Mr. Stanton, informing him that he had been successful in his search for the owner of the property at the time Dugdale had occupied a room under its roof, and that he hoped in a short time to find the name of the person who had rented the house during that year.

Dick had hardly digested the contents of this letter, when Barber entered the office and inquired for him.

“Well,” he said, “I have found Mrs. Tomlinson,

after a good search I can tell you. Her husband is dead, but the old ale house is still in existence, kept by the man who bought it from her after her husband's death."

"What is her address?" sharply asked Dick, cutting the old man short in the tale of the search he was preparing to give in detail.

To answer so directly was not the purpose of the old man. Ignoring Dick's question, he said:

"Mrs. Tomlinson recollects the Dugdales well. It was she who buried Mrs. Dugdale and took the baby home with her after the funeral. But she thinks the baby was adopted out by Mr. Dugdale, but as she did not see much of him after his wife's death, she is not clear on this point. I don't believe we will get much out of her, but in thinking this matter over——"

"Give me her address," demanded Dick imperatively.

Dick was ruthlessly destroying the schemes the old man had so laboriously builded. Mrs. Tomlinson was a sharp old woman, having little confidence in her former employer. Therefore she had not been at all communicative. Barber, appreciating this, leaped to the conclusion that she possessed information most desirable, and used all the tact and diplomacy he could employ, but without avail. The greater the effort he put forth, the firmer became her determination to keep her own counsel. With a shrewdness superior to his own she induced the old ballet-master to tell that he was making the inquiry on behalf of a Mr. Mason, who was an agent of Mr. Hetlow. The latter name aroused her recollections and she recalled that Edmund Dugdale had more than once told her of his relationship to a man of that name. Barber was finally compelled to retire, but he did so with the determination to return again to the attack, and again and again, until he had finally succeeded. But Dick's imperative ways were destroying his plans.

"Give me her address," repeated Dick. "I don't want you to question her. I'll do that myself."

"No. — Prospect Street, Brooklyn." The old man was crushed.

"Now," said Dick, pointing to a desk. "Sit down and write a letter saying that the bearer is the Mr. Mason on whose behalf you called yesterday."

Overborne by Dick's masterful ways, and influenced by the fact that he saw Dick put his hand in his pocket and take out a large roll of bills, Barber did as he was told. When he had finished, Dick gave him a note the size of which nearly made him faint with joy.

"Now," said Dick, dismissing him, "you can continue to serve me by finding other people who knew Dugdale. Your information will be paid for."

Dick lost no time in going to the house of Mrs. Tomlinson. When he handed Barber's letter to her and she read it, she looked up with surprise. Attributing her surprise to a suspicion that he was not the person he represented himself to be, he said:

"If that letter does not assure you I am the Mr. Mason, I have other credentials which will prove my identity."

"It is not that," she responded quickly, evidently favorably impressed by her visitor, "but I thought I was speaking to Mr. Mason last night."

Dick was puzzled, and asked her to explain.

"A gentleman called to see me last night after 'Teddy' Barber had been here," she said, "and I thought he was Mr. Mason."

"Did he say his name was Mason?" asked Dick.

"Why, when I come to think on it, I cannot say that he did. He asked me if I was the Mrs. Tomlinson Barber had called on, on behalf of Mr. Mason. And so I thought it must be Mr. Mason, you see."

Dick was puzzled all the more. At first he was inclined to believe the person was Mr. Stanton, but Mrs. Tomlinson's description of her caller disposed of

that idea, even if it had not occurred to him that Mr. Stanton had no knowledge of Barber, nor Barber of Stanton. He could not imagine the meaning of it. Finally he concluded that Barber had employed some one to endeavor to draw out Mrs. Tomlinson after his own failure.

"Well, Mrs. Tomlinson," after a moment's silence, "your caller was not Mr. Mason, for he is here now."

He took some papers from his pocket and handing them to her, added:

"Here are some papers which will prove to you I am Mr. Mason. I wish you would look at them, for I have some questions to ask which I very much desire to have answered."

Mrs. Tomlinson returned them after a careless overlooking, remarking that she was satisfied without them. She had trusted to her intuitions.

"Then," said Dick, "we may go on. But first let me ask the business of the person who called last night."

"He wanted me to tell all I knew about Mr. Dugdale."

This answer confirmed Dick in his belief that the caller was an agent of Barber, and when Mrs. Tomlinson went on to say that she told him all she knew, because she had nothing to conceal, and had been contrary with "Teddy" because "Teddy" had acted as if she were bound to tell him everything because she had once been in his employ, he was still further convinced it was simply an effort of the old man to worm into the secrets of the case. So he proceeded to question Mrs. Tomlinson on the matters upon which he desired to be informed.

The greater part of her recital was mainly confirmation of what he had already learned. What was new and essential was that, after Mrs. Dugdale's death, she had cared for the child until she was compelled to go with her husband to Boston, where he had an engagement in a theater. Returning the next summer she

had again cared for the babe. She had found Dugdale distressed and despairing. He talked of finding a good home for the child and yielding it up, as the best thing he could do for it. While she had the child the second summer, Dugdale suddenly died, and at first she supposed the child would fall to her to bring up. It was her custom to spend a portion of the day in Union Square, where she met a lady who the summer before had been attracted to the child, and who now learning from Mrs. Tomlinson its homeless condition, expressed a desire to adopt it.

She had brought her husband to Mrs. Tomlinson the next day to make the proposition, which was not accepted, because Mrs. Tomlinson wanted first to consult *her* husband. When the husband came home it was with the announcement that they must prepare for a journey to Montreal, where he had taken an engagement. They concluded that the best disposition they could make of the child was to permit this lady to take it, and busy as her husband was he went out to make inquiries, which satisfied them that the lady and her husband were proper persons to take the child. As their time was limited, and as the people with whom Dugdale had lodged at the time of his death were very kindly and respectable people, they determined to carry the child, with the address of the lady and gentleman, to them, and ask them to attend to the details of its settlement. This had been done, and Mrs. Tomlinson had been subsequently informed that the transfer had been accomplished and that the baby was in a good home. And that was the last she had heard of it, for when she returned, the people in the MacDougall Street house had moved away and she had lost all trace of them.

"Do you recollect the name?" asked Dick.

"Yes, it was Powers. None of their old neighbors knew positively where they had moved to, but there was a belief it was to Newark."

"You recollect, of course, the name of the lady and gentleman who adopted the child?"

"No, I don't," replied Mrs. Tomlinson earnestly. "I carried the address to Mrs. Powers, but forgot it afterward."

"Didn't they give the name in the letter written to you at Montreal?"

"Yes, but that letter I lost. I've tried again and again to recall the name, but it has slipped from me. I cannot."

Nothing Dick could do elicited anything more from Mrs. Tomlinson essential to his search.

However he felt that there had been a substantial advance made. The child had not died. It had been adopted by someone, and the name of the person through whom the adoption was made had been obtained. So asking Mrs. Tomlinson not to inform Barber of the purpose of his search, which he had revealed to her, he left her and returned to New York.

On arriving at his office he found another letter from Mr. Stanton, telling him that the old lawyer had an important fact to communicate, and that Wallis had charged him with delivering an important message, and closed with the wish that since he had been unable to see him, Dick should run up to Dobbs Ferry and spend the night. And so Dick hastened to take the train.

Wallis was not at home when he arrived. She had gone to ride with Bessie, not expecting him until a later hour. This was a disappointment, for though his journey was supposed to be wholly connected with the search, yet his thoughts were more given to the misunderstanding which had arisen between himself and Bessie. If the truth were told he was far more desirous of knowing what success had attended Wallis in her efforts at clearing the atmosphere, than he was of learning what the old lawyer's important communication might be. Moreover he feared that Wallis had

failed in the exercise of a proper discretion, and had told Bessie of his frank confession of his love for her. And he feared that if Wallis had done so, Bessie would take umbrage at that. By conjuring up all sort of doubts and possibilities, as lovers are so apt to do in that period when hope and uncertainty hold equal sway, Dick had succeeded in making himself very uncomfortable. On arriving, he found the old lawyer seated upon the veranda overlooking the river, intent upon the panorama below.

"O Mason! You are earlier than I expected," was Mr. Stanton's greeting as he came down the steps to meet him. "Powers was the name of those people who lived in the MacDougall Street house."

Dick laughed as he replied:

"I supposed I would give you the news. I learned that fact this morning."

"What more do you know," asked the lawyer, much interested.

"Not a single fact more."

"Well, I know a little more," said the lawyer, as he motioned Dick to be seated in one of the cane-bottomed chairs on the veranda. "The head of the family was named James. He was a morocco finisher. His family consisted of a wife and two girls—small ones then. The MacDougall Street house belongs to the old Gadwise estate, and the man who has had charge of it for thirty years has so still. He has kept a record of all the tenants."

Dick told him of his interview with Mrs. Tomlinson.

"Well," said the old gentleman, having listened closely to the recital, "well, certain facts are established. The child was adopted by someone yet unknown. The chances are that it is alive. The next step is to find James Powers. Here the chances are against you. Assuming that he was thirty-five in 1857, he would be over sixty years old now. The chances are largely that he is dead. And his wife

also. You say that Mrs. Tomlinson told you that there was a belief that he had moved to Newark. That is quite likely since he was a morocco finisher, because Newark has been for many years a place where the leather industry flourished. The course to pursue is to put a man on the track of Powers—send him to Newark to inquire at the morocco places. In the meantime my people at the office will insert advertisements in the papers asking for information as to him. This will be better than for you to do so, because you have had one of a similar kind afloat for some days. I will see this Tomlinson woman," continued the lawyer; "I may get something from her you failed to obtain."

"Perhaps you may," replied Dick, "for you are trained in examination and I am not; but, to be frank, I do not think you will. She is a woman of a good memory and an orderly mind. I believe she gave me all she knew."

"It may be so," the lawyer returned, "yet she might have said something which escaped your attention, which, if followed up, would have elicited something. I don't suppose you asked her any questions, for instance, about the conversation she had with the woman who talked to the baby in the Park—whether she talked at all about herself."

At this moment there was a slight noise just behind them at the window, which caused them both to look around, but as the blinds were closed they saw nothing.

"No," answered Dick. "I took it for granted that they talked only of the baby."

"That's just it," said Mr. Stanton. "Yet it is inconceivable that these two women should have talked together on several days without revealing something of themselves. I think possibly I could start her memory to some effect. You say this Tomlinson woman had the baby for nearly three months in the first summer?"

"Yes."

"A year old, then?"

"Yes."

"The next summer only four weeks?"

"That is all."

"Two years old then when the Powers got possession of it and turned it over to the woman who adopted it. It ought not be difficult to trace it. But let me caution you not to talk about this part of the affair."

Dick imagined that he heard the sound of labored breathing, but upon looking up at the old gentleman found him as placid as a summer morning. So he replied:

"You can rely upon my discretion, sir."

At this moment the roll of wheels upon the gravel upon the drive at the other side of the house was heard. The mingling of two fresh young voices also was heard, and Dick concluded that Bessie and Wallis had returned from their drive.

But as Mr. Stanton made no motion to rise Dick could not. A moment later the carriage was heard as it rolled away, and Mr. Stanton took up the talk again by saying he must also see Barber and put him through a course of sprouts.

When Wallis entered she was met by her aunt, who was in a most excited state.

"I knew it," she cried, as soon as Wallis stepped within the door. "I knew I should hear bad news. I had a dream last night and I knew it would come."

"What has come?" asked Wallis anxiously.

"The bad news."

"But what is it?" asked Wallis, somewhat alarmed as she laid off her hat, going to her aunt.

"Your uncle has a baby."

Wallis broke into a ringing laugh, awakening the echoes of the old house and penetrating to the veranda where Mr. Stanton and Dick were sitting, filling the

air with its music. The two men laughed together in sympathy.

"You may laugh," protested Mrs. Stanton, much vexed. "But it is true. I heard him arranging for its care."

"With whom indeed?" laughed Wallis, for she perceived that her aunt was seized by one of her fits of unreasoning jealousy.

"With Mr. Mason. I knew that young man had something to do with it, when he first came here."

"Why, nonsense, auntie," said Wallis, "they were doubtlessly talking about the young man Mr. Mason is looking for—the Dugdale heir."

"Do they call a young man who is twenty-six if he is a day, a baby?" asked Mrs. Stanton severely.

"Well, hardly," confirmed Wallis, still unconvinced.

"Is a baby two years old an heir to the Dugdale property?" queried Mrs. Stanton, following up her advantage.

"No, I should think not."

"This baby is two years old."

"Why, auntie, how do you know?"

"Didn't I tell you I heard your uncle admit it? Didn't they sit out on the veranda and shamelessly discuss it? Your uncle figured up—the wretch—and said it was two years old this summer. And didn't they both talk of the baby having been lost? put away by its mother—the shameless thing—and didn't your uncle beg Mr. Mason to make every effort to trace it? And didn't I hear him say he thought those Powers had it?"

"And who are the Powers?" asked Wallis, bewildered by the proof her aunt was piling up, yet still certain and confident as to the moral integrity of her uncle.

"How do you suppose I should know?" demanded her aunt indignantly. "If I did, wouldn't I go at once and demand the proof by which I could forever shame

your uncle and confound him? Some of the low people he associates with, I suppose, when my eyes are not upon him."

"Oh, aunt, you are mistaken; you have not understood properly."

"Have I ears?" asked the poor lady, highly wrought up by the opposition she was meeting with. "Have I intelligence? Can I comprehend what I hear? I'll find out now for the first time. I have names. There is a Tomlinson, and a Barber and a Powers, and a detective to hunt for the baby. Oh, I'll get at the bottom of it. Your uncle is going to advertise for the Powers in the papers. Oh, I'll get at the bottom of it. He shall not escape me now by his cunning, in making it appear as if I was ridiculous! Oh, no! It is the heart woman in the red shawl, and I know it."

The object of the good woman's suspicions put an end to her confidences, by appearing at the other end of the hall, and calling out to Wallis that Mr. Mason was on the veranda.

"Now Wallis," said Mrs. Stanton hastily and warningly, "be discreet. Say nothing to anyone. I'll say nothing until I get the proof. Go and entertain Mr. Mason, so that they cannot conspire further. I will go to see about dinner. When I asked for a decent carriage, he said I must wait until next summer. But the blonde woman in the red shawl, she can have anything she wants."

Wallis, scarcely able to preserve her gravity, assured her aunt that at least she would not speak to Mr. Mason of the great discovery, and went forward to meet him.

CHAPTER VII.

DISQUIETING NEWS.

FROM the remarks made by her uncle, and the questions he asked Dick, after she appeared on the veranda, Wallis learned that progress had been made in the search, and that her aunt's suspicions were wholly unfounded.

From her Dick learned that Mr. Hetlow had returned from the journey he had gone upon the day Dick was last at Dobbs Ferry. With a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, she expressed the belief that Mr. Hetlow would be pleased to see Dick, and learn from his own lips the progress the search was making, and concluded by proposing that he should accompany her to call at the Hetlow mansion, after dinner. To this Dick made no answer, nor in fact did he have the opportunity, for Mr. Stanton acquiescing in the proposition, said he would go with them, adding that Mr. Hetlow did not yet know that he was interfering in the affair, and that it was high time he did.

Dick's face was evidently the cause of amusement to Wallis. It presented expressions of desire, dislike, and embarrassment, ludicrously blended. He did not know how to meet the situation forced upon him. He could not refuse without giving Mr. Stanton a reason, and he could not give as that reason his misunderstanding with Bessie. Wallis would not assist him, but, upon the contrary, persisted in increasing the gravity of the situation, to his evident distress, and her own amusement, until he began to contemplate a sudden attack of illness as the only way out of the difficulty.

Having extracted sufficient entertainment from the condition of the hapless young man, Wallis proposed a walk over the tunnel before dinner, to which Dick eagerly consented, since he so much desired a talk with her alone.

The walk over the tunnel was one of the treats offered visitors to Springhill, the old name of the Stanton place.

Mr. Stanton's land stretched out to the river, to which it descended abruptly by a precipitous range of rock. Through this rock a long tunnel had been bored for the way of the Hudson River Railroad. At the extreme end of the bluff overlooking the river, a summer-house had been built, from which a long view of the river, with its floating craft, could be had. From this point, a rough wooden stairway descended to the water's edge, where there was a small boathouse, the shelter of a light rowboat in which Wallis and Bessie had spent many happy hours, but now rotting from neglect and disuse. From the south the railroad tracks entered the tunnel, through a rough rock cutting, the sides of which gradually ran down from the face of the tunnel to the level of the tracks. From the top of the tunnel opening to the top of the rock was a distance of twenty or twenty-five feet, almost perpendicular. It had not always borne this appearance, but, as the accident records of the company could show, many years previous, a large amount of rock had been detached and had fallen upon the track below, leaving its face bare and ragged. As the years had passed, small evergreen trees and bushes had grown upon the ledges made by the broken rocks. Immediately over the center, at the extreme top, a large piece projected, and this had been guarded by a rail set up by Mr. Stanton, so that one could walk out in safety upon it and leaning over, watch the trains plunge into the tunnel, or see them dash out with their thundering noise.

This was one of the sights of Springhill, and to this spot Wallis led Dick.

As they leaned over this railing, looking down upon the tracks, Wallis said:

"You were not pleased with my suggestion to go to the Hetlows' to-night."

"How could you be so unkind?" asked Dick reproachfully. "Any meeting with Miss Hetlow must now be full of embarrassment for both of us."

"I suppose so," said Wallis, adding maliciously, "you should not have lost your temper."

"Temper!" replied Dick in surprise. "Surely I made no display of temper!"

"Bessie says you behaved in a perfectly outrageous manner; accused her of all sorts of things, and I said I had no doubt of it."

Dick looked up at her, to see the mischief dancing in her dark eyes, and remarked with humorous sarcasm:

"Your efforts at clearing the atmosphere seem to have been attended with great success."

She laughed merrily, as she said:

"Of course there must be some embarrassment when two such geese as you have been, first meet after your foolishness. But be consoled, I have acted the part of your friend, I have insisted to her that it was from no indifference to her that you undertook to find young Dugdale."

"I hope you did not tell her what I said to you in a moment of bitterness and confidence," said Dick anxiously.

"Am I not your friend? Do you not suppose that I know a girl wants to hear that she is loved from the man who loves her? Oh, I was discreet."

Dick was silent as he busied himself with pushing small pebbles over the rocks with his foot, but he was also busy with his thoughts, for he could not see how Wallis could have persuaded Bessie that he was not

indifferent to Bessie's interests without revealing to her the feelings he had confessed he had entertained. At best Wallis was unsatisfactory. The question was, and this Wallis did not answer, Was Bessie convinced? He endeavored to induce her to say more.

"Was this the news you desired to give me?"

"Mercy, no! I had nearly forgotten. Who do you think is coming to visit Mr. Hetlow—all the way from England?"

"The Prince of Wales?"

"Nonsense! Yet pretty nearly as great a personage. Lord Merrimount, second son of the Duke of Mountchessington—a real—live—English—nobleman."

"The dev—I mean you don't say so."

"I just do mean to say so! Now what do you think of that? He comes introduced by the Dugdale family solicitor."

"What is he coming here for?"

Wallis turned upon him with intense scorn.

"Now just stand up and look me in the eyes. There! Now what else do you suppose he's coming for than—"

"Than what?"

"Why to propose for Bessie, of course."

"Does he send that word?"

"Well, are not men stupid! Did he send that word? No, he didn't. Of course not."

"Then how do you know?"

"Why gracious, what dullness! The Dugdale solicitor is also the solicitor of the Duke's family. He knows that Bessie is heir to the untold Dugdale millions. The Duke's family are not rich, and so he sends young Lord Merrimount over here to make love to Bessie, so as to restore the fortunes of the ducal family. Why it's so plain any one, but you, could see it. Didn't the letter say that he would make a proposition relative to the Dugdale estate which he

thought Mr. Hetlow ought to give serious thought to?"

"Wallis," said Dick, after a moment's silence, "do you know that I feel in my bones that I won't like that real—live—young—saphead of an English nobleman."

"I shall just hate him."

"I never did like English noblemen. It is one of the peculiarities of my nature that I hate an English nobleman whenever I meet one."

"How many have you ever met?"

"Not one. That, however, does not alter the fact. Wallis, I'll defeat that Lord What's-his-name, if I involve the two countries in a war."

"And I'll make his life miserable while he's here."

Dick put out his hand to Wallis.

"It is a compact then—for blood and war—for life and death. Wallis, there is an easy way to crush him."

"How."

"Find the missing Dugdale. Then your Lord won't want Miss Hetlow."

"An additional incentive for your work. But we must go back for dinner."

As lightly as Dick had treated the news of the coming of Merrimount, for it was his habit to conceal his real emotions under the guise of a humorous triviality, he was much troubled. With Wallis, he believed that the only object of the young nobleman's visit was to secure the Dugdale millions by securing Bessie. He thought he knew Mr. Hetlow well enough to know that the old merchant would be so flattered by the prospect of an alliance with a family of such high rank in the mother country, that, from the moment of his arrival, the young Englishman would have a potent and efficient ally in the father of the girl he would come to woo. So, though he laughed and joked with the others at the dinner-table over the purpose of the

nobleman's visit, he felt his dislike growing stronger for the arrogant foreigner, as he called him.

After dinner, they went to the Hetlow mansion. Mr. Hetlow welcomed him cordially, but he immediately perceived that Bessie's manner, though perhaps intended to be gracious, was marked by great constraint. How he had expected to be received by her he could not have explained to himself, but he was distinctly conscious that he resented her manner. With a perversity for which he cursed himself later in the evening, he assumed an air of coldness and indifference, which immediately was met by Bessie with an equal amount of haughtiness. Their quarrel was continued, though only words of the utmost commonplace were exchanged between them. Wallis loyally endeavored to smooth the difficulties and exercised no little ingenuity in an effort to bring the two together. But they were as unmovable as rocks, and finally she lost her temper.

As opportunities presented themselves she informed each, at different times, that they were a pair of idiots for whom it was little use to attempt to do anything.

With a feeling that he was gratifying a resentment, Dick told Mr. Hetlow, with positive enthusiasm, the progress made, and was unnecessarily confident as to the ultimate success of his search, while Bessie, feeling also that she was gratifying a similar feeling, combated his theories and plans and doubted his conclusions.

As a consequence, Wallis saw all her friendly and amiable schemes fall to the ground, while the two parted with the breach wider than before, and each convinced that the other had lost the interest which each had hoped had been felt for the other.

Dick was quite sure the prospects of so much wealth, and the possibility of attaining to high social rank by reason of its possession, was the cause of Bessie's treatment of himself, while Bessie was certain some fairer girl had stolen into Dick's affections.

Wallis was too indignant over the perversity of each to even scold Dick, and dismissed him to his room for the night with the contemptuous remark that such a stupid didn't deserve to have the affection of such a girl as Bessie.

The next morning, Mr. Stanton accompanied Dick to New York. On the cars, Dick found an item in the morning paper which interested him and which he pointed out to Mr. Stanton. It was this:

“Yesterday afternoon, there died after an illness of only an hour, a character well known in certain circles—Edward Barber. He was a man over seventy, and was quite celebrated as a ballet dancer and director of the ballet at one time—then known to fame as Signor Barberini. After many years' service at the Drury Lane, he came to this country to take charge of the ballet of the Italian Opera. In 1856, however, he received a paralytic stroke, from which he never fully recovered. Since then he has been a costumer and dresser of theatrical stars. He was taken ill in a saloon he much affected and was carried, by two companions with whom he was drinking, to the room he occupied in the neighborhood. He had no family.”

“You will not be able to question Barber,” said Dick.

CHAPTER VIII.

COUNTERPLOTS.

ON the afternoon of the day, the night of which Mason passed at Mr. Stanton's house, three men sat in close confidence in the back room of the Sixth Avenue drinking-place frequented by Barber. Two of the trio we have seen as the companions of the old ballet-master, in the enjoyment of the proceeds of his visit to Dick.

The third was a man who could be found every morning about the Tombs courts, acting as counsel for as many of the poor unfortunates caught in the meshes of the police net on the previous night, as he could discover possessed money, or could obtain it. A few years ago such men were called "Tombs sharks." The police authorities credited this man with having a wider knowledge of and acquaintance with thieves and men of irregular lives generally, than any other one person in the city. His name was Moore. He had achieved the prenomen of "Nosey," but was addressed as Counselor by all those who were not intimate enough to call him Dennis, the name given him by his parents.

The two were giving undivided attention to the tale he was relating. When he had finished, the man with the soft voice relapsed into profound thought, the others waiting patiently for him to emerge from it.

"It is lucky," he finally said, "that old Barber is dead. He would have been in the way."

No response was made to this remark, but the younger man lit a fresh cigar, and puffed vigorously.

After a few moments of further silence the man of the soft voice again spoke.

"This is the layout," he said. "Bob, here, finds that Mason is a clerk of Hetlow, who is a brother-in-law of the old Dugdale, and granduncle to the youngster they want to find. Barber got hold of the right end of the story. There is an heir wanted for the money. If this youngster is alive he's the heir, if not Hetlow's daughter is. So they've started in to find the youngster."

"But, Ransom," said the younger man, taking the cigar from his lips that he might the more easily make his point, "how can that be? If they found the young fellow, Hetlow's daughter would be done out of the money. Why should they hunt for him?"

"Of course," replied the man called Ransom, "that seems reasonable on the face of it. But there are some men in this world so d—— honorable that they injure themselves. I expect this Hetlow's one of them. Anyhow that's what he's doing—looking for a man, who, if they find him, 'll do the girl out of a heap of money. 'Tain't for us to talk about the foolishness of it, but the fact of it. Now this one hain't been seen or heard of since he was two years old. The last that can be said of him is that at that time he was put into the hands of a man named Powers, to give to somebody else. That's as far as they've got, and the man Powers hasn't been found, so far as we know."

"I know he ain't," interjected Dennis.

"How?" asked Ransom.

For answer Moore took a newspaper from his pocket, and pointed out an advertisement, asking that any one having information as to James Powers, a morocco-finisher, who in 1857 and 1858 lived at No. — MacDougall Street, to communicate with Stanton, Boyd & Stephens, No. — Wall Street.

"That's a highly respectable law firm," said Moore.

"Now if they had got on to the track of Powers that wouldn't be in the papers."

"That's so," said the younger man.

"It tells us something more," remarked Ransom.

The other two looked inquiringly at him.

"It tells us that Powers was a morocco-finisher, and that gives us a clew. Didn't that Brooklyn woman tell you some one had told her Powers had moved to Newark?"

"She said there was an idea he had."

"It all comes back to the same thing," said Ransom after a long period of reflection during which the others waited patiently. "We know just as much as Mason or Hetlow knows. You see," he said, leaning back in his chair, "if they have got to Powers, our cake is all dough. If they haven't, we've got the chance of getting to him first. If we do, why we may get the steer that'll carry us straight to the young feller and then we'll be fixed to dicker with one side or t'other."

"Then the scheme is to get the information and sell it?" queried Moore.

"That's our part of it," replied Ransom. "Not to Mason or Stanton, but to young Dugdale himself. He'll give up more for a fortune he's coming into, than Hetlow will for one he's going out of. My point is to get the young feller and hold him."

"And it all turns on finding Powers?" asked the young man.

"Yes; and for that reason I want Dennis to start out at once."

"Where to?" asked Moore. "I'm blessed if I see a way to go."

"Go to Newark," said Ransom. "Get a list of the morocco factories and ask at each one if they know anything of Powers. I'll work the same job here in town, and Bob can get a list somewhere of morocco

factories out of town hereabouts, and write to 'em. There can't be such an allfired lot of them."

"Suppose we find him dead?" suggested Moore.

"Find what's left of the family—the widder."

"Suppose she's dead?"

"Suppose the devil," cried the younger man. "You're always setting up something to climb over. Suppose the youngster's dead when you find him? Suppose you can't get trace of him at all?"

"Which is what I hope 'll be the case," remarked Ransom.

This, said without the trace of the slightest emotion and in those dulcet tones in such contrast to his appearance, caused the utmost surprise in the others. The younger man, after staring at him for a moment, said with a puzzled air:

"You hope we can't get any trace of him?"

— "Yes," said Ransom, smiling at their wonder—a smile not pleasant to look upon and utterly without geniality.

"Well, if that ain't a riddle then I don't know one when I hear it," remarked the younger man called Bob.

"It will make it so much easier to find young Dugdale, won't it?" was the calm reply.

"Talk in English," said Bob impatiently. "I don't see your game."

"If we can't find him or trace of him, neither can Mason nor Stanton, can they?"

"I suppose that's so," said Moore.

"If they don't find Powers or any trace of young Dugdale through Powers, they've got to the end, haven't they?"

"Yes."

"That will suit them, won't it?"

"Why should it?" asked Moore.

"Because the property then'll go to Hetlow's girl. See! There's only two people who know anything

about Edmund Dugdale—Barber, and he's dead, and the Brooklyn woman. I got out of Barber all he knew. Dennis got out of the Brooklyn woman all she knew. Neither of them knew what was done with the child."

He paused and looked significantly from one to the other. The young man threw his cigar away, and said irritably:

"Oh, give it out. Give it out."

"Then what's to hinder us from finding a Dugdale anyhow?"

"The devil," said Bob and Moore in one breath.

Ransom watched them narrowly as the suggestion slowly penetrated to their minds with all its meanings and possibilities.

"It isn't so hard to do," he said, after he had waited until his startling idea had had time to find secure lodgment. "There is no one to tell them how Dugdale looked. The last time any one saw him to know who he was, he was two years old. Why, you've got the whole game in your hands! You can dicker to keep him from knowing who he is, or you can dicker to get him to refuse to be the heir, for a good round sum, or you can put him forward to take the whole of the property."

"But," cried the young man, "how are you going to prove him to be Dugdale? They aren't going to take him just because we say he is."

"That's easy enough," interjected Moore. "A few documents can be fixed up that 'ud settle that. What is difficult is to secure yourself against the real Dugdale, if he's alive, turning up some time."

"Now you've hit it," said Ransom. "So you see we've got to hunt for Powers, and so whether we find him dead or alive, it's all the same to us, but we've got to be sure."

"It's a big scheme," said the young man, "and awfully risky."

"There ain't no risk until you know just where you stand, and there's stuff to be made whichever way it turns out," replied Ransom. "There's no risk looking for Powers. If you happen to run down the true Dugdale, then you bargain with one side or t'other. There's no risk then. If you find him dead, there's money in that and no risk. If you don't find him at all, or, if finding Powers, he can't tell you anything about him, or, if you can't find Powers at all, it's easy enough to equip him with an adopted father with all the documents needed."

"You've got to find a fellow of twenty-six," said Moore.

"There he is," rejoined Ransom, pointing to the younger man.

"Me!" cried the young man, with an oath, springing from his chair. "No, you don't. I'll not put myself in any such hole."

"Why not?" asked Ransom, calmly and softly, though his eyes were blazing with an angry fire.

"I've run all the risks I'm going to. I've had enough."

The tones of the elder man were still dulcet, but there was an expression on his face which made the younger one falter.

"A fortune mounting up to millions will be better any time than a 'lifer' in the 'jug.' "

The young man turned pale, indeed he was as white as the wall against which his head rested, as he sank into his chair limply.

"You wouldn't peach?" he gasped.

"If Inspector Byrnes should happen to learn that Allan Mark Everard spent his days about a certain Sixth Avenue gin-mill, someone would go back to England, very quick."

Nerved by sudden anger the young man leaped to his feet and made a backward motion with his hand, but as quick as it was, quicker was the action of the

elder man who, mounting the table which separated them, in an instant encircled the throat of the younger man with his long white fingers, and pushed him into his chair, dragging himself across the table.

"None of that," he said, in a low voice trembling with intensity.

The young man's tongue protruded and his face grew purple as the elder one held him.

Moore sprang to the door to prevent any one entering, the moment the disturbance began. Ransom released the other, but stood over him watching him intently.

"Well," he said, "is it a 'lifer' or with me?"

"I'm with you, of course. I'm in your power."

"Oh! You know that, do you? What did you mean by going down for your gun?"

"Come, come," said Moore genially. "We're not going to get ahead with quarrels. Bob's all right. He only lost his temper. We're all in the same boat. Let's get down to business. You want me to go to Newark. Good! I'll go right away. Do we meet here to-night?"

"Yes," replied Ransom, as he returned to his side of the table, still standing, and eying the younger man narrowly. "Bob, you be here at that hour, and no nonsense."

He lounged out of the side door and crossed the street to the corner, where he stood for some time. A man crossed from the opposite corner with whom he exchanged a word or two and lounged up the avenue. Moore left the saloon by the front entrance. A moment or two after the younger man passed out of the same door and went down the avenue. The man who had exchanged words with Ransom was but a short distance behind him.

CHAPTER IX.

A FATEFUL ARRIVAL.

THE reports of the detectives sent out to obtain knowledge of James Powers were unsatisfactory. No trace had been found of the man but that he was dead, and had been for nine years previous to the making of the inquiries. His family had moved from Newark immediately after his death, and trace of them was impossible to find. One of the daughters was married and it was believed that the family had gone with her to live, but whether to Philadelphia as some believed, or into the West as did others, it was impossible to definitely determine. No one had heard the name of the son-in-law.

There was one fact in the report that caused Dick much wonder and some uneasiness. His agents had been preceded in their inquiries, no matter where they went, by a middle-aged man. The description of this man comported with Mrs. Tomlinson's description of the man calling upon her, whom she had at first taken for Mason. At that time he had concluded that the man was acting for Barber, but Barber was dead and still the inquiry was pursued. He wondered if Mr. Hetlow had employed other people on the matter without his knowledge. He was so much perplexed by this discovery, and as well by what appeared to be the end of the search, that he thought he needed the advice of Mr. Stanton. Accordingly he sent a dispatch to the old lawyer, asking if it would be agreeable to receive him that afternoon. The answer was made, not by the old lawyer, but by Wallis, to the effect

that Mr. Stanton was away for the day, but would return at night. Wallis, however, urged Dick to go up immediately as she had a matter of great importance to communicate.

Dick thereupon set out at once, and on arriving at Springhill, was met by Wallis, evidently awaiting his coming with impatience.

"He's come," she cried, before he had even alighted from his carriage.

"Who? Your uncle?" inquired Dick innocently.

"Patience! No, the lord."

"What?" cried Dick, "the Second Advent?"

Wallis stared at him, puzzled, until the sense of Dick's apparently irrelevant response stole upon her, when, with an assumption of severity, to which her dancing eyes sparkling with merriment gave the lie, she said reprovingly:

"That is wicked. What I meant was that Lord Merrimount is here."

"In this house?" asked Dick in mock astonishment. "I refuse to enter. All the blood of Bunker Hill bubbles in my veins."

"Be sensible. This is no trifling matter. No; of course he isn't here. He's over at Mr. Hetlow's."

Dick stepped out on the driveway and looked over at the Hetlows' mansion, the towers of which were gleaming under the rays of the declining sun, a prey to conflicting emotions, strong among which was a sense of self-pity that fortune had used him so ill. He recovered himself in a moment, and going back to Wallis, said with well assumed carelessness:

"I do not see that the royal standard floats from the towers, as yet at all events."

"I don't believe you care one whit whether he is there or not," said Wallis, annoyed that her information should be received so coolly. "You are very trifling, or——"

She clasped her hands in anxious expectancy:

"Or you've found young Dugdale."

"No," replied Dick, ascending the steps. "Young Dugdale still has the indecent perversity to conceal his being. What does he look like?"

"There's the worst of it," replied Wallis petulantly. "He's a real fine-looking man and a gentleman in everything."

"Worse and worse," cried Dick, dolefully sinking into a chair. "Now, if he were only fifty, with a bald head, minus his teeth——"

"He has a splendid set of teeth, and he is not any older than you are," interposed Wallis.

"The fates are perverse," murmured Dick; "Dugdale won't materialize, and Merrimount will be young and handsome. At all events," he continued hopefully, "he has neither my goodness nor sweetness."

"Goodness nor sweetness!" this with ineffable contempt. "Was there ever such conceit?"

"Nor my good clothes."

"There—I'll grant you one superiority. How do you know he hasn't your goodness nor sweetness? You haven't seen him."

"I'm arguing on general principles. In the first place, mine is of such high degree that two possessing an equal amount, in the nature of things, would not revolve in the same circle. Again, he is a British nobleman, I am an American citizen. Goodness and sweetness is inherent in the latter, but in the former——"

"Oh, spare me," broke in Wallis, "I think he is good. He looks like it."

"But as to sweetness, you are not certain."

"Pah! I think he is real nice, and very polite."

"Wallis, you have deserted me. You have gone over to the enemy."

"I haven't. But facts are facts. He's been very nice to me and is agreeable to everybody. To be sure he hems and haws a little too much, and every time I

make a remark looks at me as if I were a wild animal recently caught and tamed, and on the whole rather a curiosity. But he's very nice."

"Has he proposed to Miss Hetlow yet?"

"Why don't you ask if he telegraphed for her hand when he reached Sandy Hook? It would be quite as sensible."

"How long has he been here?"

"Four days."

"Wallis, with his advantages and under the same roof—"

"Added to your advantages of goodness and sweetness and fine clothes, you would have married Bessie in that time."

"Precisely."

"Mr. Mason, I admire you very much. Your confidence in your own powers is charming."

"I wish Miss Hetlow was of your mind. But in face of this great and immediate danger, what are we to do?"

"We? It's you."

"No; you swore fidelity to me in life or death—blood or war. You cannot desert my colors on the first sight of the enemy. Wallis, I fear me greatly, that those bewitching black eyes of yours have been dazzled by the jewels of that coronet."

"Jewels! I haven't seen any jewels yet."

"What? Do you mean to tell me that Lord Merrimount has not been wearing his glittering coronet on his head, with a golden stick in his hand?"

"How can you be so absurd! Of course not."

"Not once, eh! Wallis, we have him!"

"How?"

"We have him! A man who carries a glittering coronet around in his trunk, and doesn't know that the place for it, in this country, of all countries, is on his head, is gone—he's easily demolished."

"What nonsense are you talking?"

"Why, if he had mounted that coronet at the first dinner, all the women, from you down to the scullery maid would have been contemplating the tip end of his polished boots in adoration."

"You're positively insulting."

"He'll lose the game through his ignorance of the weakness of the natives."

"And you expect me to be your friend after such abuse?"

"I promise you I shan't inform him. Magnanimity is my strong point, but there is a limit—a limit even to mine."

"There ought to be a limit to your foolish tongue. Let us go over to Bessie. Perhaps you may meet him."

"O Heavens, no."

"Afraid of him?"

"Afraid of him? No. But it is against my American principles to encourage noblemen by recognition of their existence."

"Really! I am quite sure if Lord Merrimount could hear you, he would be crushed."

"I perceive, Wallis, and I greatly regret it, that the title of that misguided young man trips off your tongue with a lingering unctuousness, as if you were loathe to let it go."

"Will you go with me? I dare you to go!"

"I will rise to heights of moral grandeur. I will be dared."

"The American citizen, as represented by you, seems to be timid."

"I will not be ridiculed into descending from my high moral perch. But I will compromise with you. I'll write a note to Mr. Hetlow, and ask if he will receive me."

Dick suddenly became very sober.

"To be sensible again," he continued, "I have a reason, apart from any consideration of Lord Merrimount for making my intercourse with Mr. Hetlow,

in his own house, as formal as possible. I do not forget that Mr. Hetlow once delicately hinted something about the inexpediency of junior clerks being received at their employers' houses on terms of social equality. True, I am not now a junior clerk, but I have never been invited to visit Mr. Hetlow in any other capacity than as assistant. So, if you will permit me, I will address a note to him."

About the time Dick was asking Wallis for writing materials, Mr. Hetlow was taking Lord Merrimount into the library, at the request of the young nobleman for a formal interview.

Bessie had refused to believe that the object of Lord Merrimount's visit was to propose for her hand. Yet she had heard so much from Wallis and others about her, all of whom had settled into the fixed belief that such was his object, that when she learned the two had shut themselves up in the library, she became nervous and excited, and could no longer remain in her apartments. So she ran out to consult with Wallis as to the course she should pursue, in case the conference with her father and Lord Merrimount resulted in a proposal for her hand. While she bitterly condemned herself for entertaining the idea that her hand was the object of the young nobleman's visit to America, yet she determined she would not yield, however disappointed her father might be. She would not admit herself that her heart was given to Dick. Of course that idea was preposterous after the way he had treated her. But she determined that the man who won her hand must first win her heart, and to do that he must possess qualities similar to those of Mr. Mason. She was quite young enough to forego brilliant position in the world for a man she loved and admired the most, but which of course was not Mr. Mason. Oh, no! Not after that day when he had attributed such base and sordid motives to her and had dared to reprove her.

What Mr. Hetlow's opinion was as to the meaning of the young nobleman's visit no one knew, for he had expressed none, however slight. If he shared that prevailing at "The Larches" he must have been greatly surprised when that object was unfolded.

With little hesitation and in a simple and direct manner, Lord Merrimount set forth that the family estates were heavily burdened. The cost of maintaining the various places which made up the estate was heavy, and, as misfortune had followed upon misfortune, the personal property of the family had been so greatly reduced that it was only with the greatest difficulty that the yearly obligations could be met. This was the condition of affairs when the family solicitor, also bearing the same relation to the Dugdale estate, had proposed, in view of the fact that the sole heir to the Dugdale estate was a woman, who probably would not care to continue the business, that the Duke of Mount-chessington should purchase an interest in the business, and place his second son in the concern as a partner, the proceeds of which partnership should be devoted to lifting the family burden. To that end Lord Merrimount had come to offer fifty thousand pounds in cash for such interest as could be mutually agreed upon.

This proposition had just been submitted when Dick's note was presented to Mr. Hetlow. Excusing himself to Merrimount, Mr. Hetlow, after reading the note, said that the letter was in touch with the very subject they were in conference over. Asking permission to answer it, he did so by requesting Dick to present himself at once. Then turning to Merrimount, he said that it was not yet determined whether his daughter was the heir. He related to the young nobleman the tale with which the reader is familiar, and concluded by saying that the note he had just read was from one of his most trusted assistants, and to whom was confided the search for the young Dugdale. Continuing, he said:

"I have asked Mr. Mason to come to us at once. He may have some information directly bearing upon this matter which we have under advisement. He is stopping with a neighbor, and I imagine, although I have no knowledge, has aspirations for the hand of the young lady of the house. However this is not to the point. Your lordship will see that since the succession to the Dugdale estate is not determined, since it is among the possibilities that young Dugdale may be found, it is really impossible at this juncture to entertain the proposition. If young Dugdale is found, of course neither my daughter nor myself will have a voice in the disposal of the Dugdale estate. If however Dugdale is found to be dead, or cannot be found at all, then my daughter will succeed, and then only can we entertain the proposition you have done us such honor to make. As the matter now stands, I would suggest that your lordship make 'The Larches' your home until the matter is definitely determined one way or the other."

Mr. Hetlow had only concluded his statement, when Dick's card was presented. Bidding the servant to conduct Dick to the library, Mr. Hetlow continued to Merrimount:

"Thus you will perceive, my lord, that at present my daughter cannot be declared the heir."

At this moment Dick was announced, and the servant retired. The young nobleman and the old merchant were standing at the window with their backs to the door and so engrossed that neither had heard the announcement of Dick's presence. As a consequence, that luckless young man was left standing at the door an unwilling listener to the conversation.

"I am deeply sensible of the alliance you propose," said the old merchant.

"Hang it!" thought Dick, "why don't they turn? I don't want to hear my own misery."

"As you will perceive, until this search is concluded

and my daughter's status is fixed, I cannot entertain your proposition. Indeed it would be neither just to her nor to you."

The young nobleman bowed in acquiescence.

"One thing more," continued Mr. Hetlow, "and then, with your permission, we will drop the subject. I have talked little with my daughter as to her prospects while such uncertainty hung about them. Therefore I beg you will not address her upon the subject."

The young nobleman, with a bow, said that under the circumstances he would not think of doing so, and thanked the old gentleman for his frankness and courtesy.

Dick could stand it no longer. He deliberately kicked a piece of furniture to announce his presence, causing both to turn.

"Ah, Mason!" cried Mr. Hetlow, "I'm glad you've come. Lord Merrimount, this is one of my most trusted lieutenants (he said leftenants), Mr. Mason, of whom I spoke a moment ago."

The two young men bowed, the nobleman most cordially, and, as Dick felt bound to admit, without a trace of that haughty reserve he had expected to meet with. On his own part he was about to extend his hand, when it occurred to him that he had heard somewhere that Englishmen did not shake hands, so he contented himself with an inclination of his head, somewhat more reserved than was his wont.

Merrimount was "chawmed" to meet Mr. Mason, and Dick was pleased to know Lord Merrimount.

"Mr. Mason," said Mr. Hetlow, after asking Dick to be seated, "we were discussing the search you have charge of, in its relation to a proposition I have had the honor to receive from Lord Merrimount. Your coming is timely, and we would like to know the latest."

"I presume," said Dick, turning to the young noble-

man and thinking what a handsome fellow he was, "that Lord Merrimount has been informed as to the condition of the search up to the present."

"Yes," responded Merrimount, "Mr. Hetlow has been kind enough."

"Then," continued Dick, "you know that latterly the search has been directed to the discovery of one James Powers, a morocco-finisher."

The young Englishman bowed to indicate he so understood.

"By the report of the detective," Dick went on, "made to me this morning, it appears that James Powers, after having finished morocco all his life, finished his earthly career about nine years ago."

Mr. Hetlow frowned over this levity, but the eyes of the young nobleman sparkled with suppressed humor.

"The family, consisting of the widow and two daughters, one of them married, disappeared shortly after the death of Powers, but where they went or where they are now, we have up to the present time been unable to discover. In short, with all the diligence we have used, or the acumen we could employ, we are really but little nearer the end than in the beginning."

"Then," said Mr. Hetlow, "as a matter of fact, nothing definite has been ascertained."

"That is it, sir. I have come here to consult with Mr. Stanton as to the next step. He is fertile in devices, and has had a large experience, as a lawyer, in hunting lost heirs."

"Very properly," remarked Mr. Hetlow. Then changing his tone, he said to Dick's astonishment:

"Mr. Mason, Lord Merrimount will remain with us until something definite is reached. I shall look to you to assist in making his stay in America agreeable. Young men can cater for young men's amusement better than old men can."

The words Dick gave expression to upon the spur of the moment were idle and hollow, wrung from him in his surprise.

"I will be pleased to devote myself to Lord Merrimount," he said.

"Thank you," said the young Englishman heartily, rising and extending his hand to Dick. "But please drop the title. It isn't anything in this country, you know. I'd rather be called Merrimount."

As Dick took the other's hand, and felt the firm hearty grasp with which his own was taken, he appreciated the sincerity of the man, and felt a strong liking for the Englishman; moreover he was distinctly conscious that the young nobleman had formed the same feeling for himself. It was one of those strong fancies which not infrequently occur between men instantly on meeting, which is not to be explained.

"Mason, you will dine with us to-night," said Hetlow. "Dinner at seven."

Accepting the invitation, given as it was in a spirit he could not resent, he begged to retire to prepare himself.

As he wandered along the crooked path leading to Mr. Stanton's house, he muttered to himself:

"Hang it; he's just the kind of fellow I didn't want him to be—handsome, courteous, simple, unaffected, a d—— good fellow, d—— him."

He did not see Wallis until in the evening, when he walked back from "The Larches" with her.

"Well," he said, "he's gone and done it."

"Done what?" asked Wallis, with a gasp.

"He has proposed for Miss Hetlow's hand."

"Lord Merrimount has? Oh, we feared that was what the library conference meant. Did Mr. Hetlow consent? Of course he did."

"No; he said, 'until it was definitely settled that Miss Hetlow was the heir, everything must remain in

suspense.' In the meantime Merrimount is to say nothing to Miss Hetlow."

"And the sword is to dangle over her head all the while?"

"Yes; but a chance is left us. I will find that Dugdale."

"You certainly must."

As Wallis left Dick for the night, she whispered to him:

"Bessie doesn't want Merrimount. She won't have him at any price."

CHAPTER X.

A PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

WHEN Dick consulted Mr. Stanton as to the course to be pursued in view of the failure of the search for Powers the lawyer had little to offer. The best advice he could give was that advertisements, calling upon persons having knowledge of James Powers, deceased, to communicate with Stanton, Boyd & Stevens, should be spread far and wide.

The old lawyer was evidently puzzled by the information given him by Dick that a person was conducting a search upon parallel lines. The thought occurred to him, as it had to Dick, that perhaps Mr. Hetlow unknown to them had employed other people, but Dick disposed of that idea, by telling him that he had questioned Mr. Hetlow upon the point, and had received the assurance that no one but himself had been so employed. Mr. Stanton was inclined to give the fact a greater importance than Dick had been. But, with all the consideration he gave to it, he could not suggest a purpose.

"It would be strange," he said, "if the young Dugdale was endeavoring to establish proof of his identity, starting from the end we are seeking and, in working toward us, crossing our lines in the endeavor. It is by no means improbable. All we can do, however, is to await developments."

And so, without a satisfactory result from their consultation, Dick went to his bed, much disturbed over the events of the day.

During the dinner mention had been made of West

Point, which had interested Lord Merrimount. Learning that the place was not far distant, the young nobleman expressed an earnest desire to visit it. Out of the talk and the desire, came the arrangement that on the following day Dick should accompany the young Englishman with letters of introduction to some of the officers stationed there. At first, it had been suggested that a party should be arranged, consisting of the young ladies and Mrs. Stanton as chaperon. But this had been abandoned, by reason of Bessie's opposition, pleading prior engagements, but which Dick attributed to her disinclination to be of a party of which he was one.

It was true that Bessie's opposition arose from the fact that Dick would be one of the party, but not from dislike of him, but because of the fear of embarrassments, to arise from such close associations as it would entail.

Accordingly, early in the morning of the next day, the two young men set forth. The day was not marked by any incident of moment, but it afforded an opportunity for the young men to become better acquainted with each other. The impression each had made upon the other upon their first meeting was deepened, and Dick was forced to admit that Merrimount was not only a right good fellow but a man of sense and ability, not at all disposed to take advantage of his rank and birth, but rather disposed to lay them aside as of no possible concern in this country.

He puzzled Dick, however, by many of his remarks. For instance he said:

"I don't see any leisure class in this country. Everybody seems to have occupation, and everybody is prosperous. I don't think I am like that famous countryman of mine who, upon entering France, and seeing three women wearing *sabots*, jotted down in his note book that all the women in France wore wooden shoes, but it does seem to me, I see more universal

luxury in life than I am accustomed to observing at home. I suppose it comes from the fact that every one is engaged in producing. We will come to it at home. We will have to, to save ourselves. People of our class are now doing things that would not have been dreamed of five-and-twenty years ago. For instance, I am seeking to go into trade, as you probably know, for that is what my proposition to Mr. Hetlow really involves."

"Well, I'll be hanged," thought Dick, "he proposes to become the largest wool merchant in England by marrying Bessie. It is an ingenious way of getting into business. I suppose Bessie is a mere incident to this going into trade."

"Mr. Hetlow has doubtless told you of this?" continued Merrimount.

"No," replied Dick, "he has given me no confidence on the matter."

"Oh, well then, I ought to say nothing more, but what I have said will suffice to show what a change is taking place at home. The caste wall is breaking down rapidly—so rapidly indeed that the Radicals are predicting that the Queen will be the last ruler under the theory of divine right. Of course the traditions of our house are against any such theory, for we are loyal supporters of the crown; but the leveling tendencies of the age have entered our circle, and the family indorsed my mission to this country, and is willing that I should devote myself to trade. Indeed many of the old families are making alliances, by marriage with tradespeople, which would even twenty years ago have been called a *mésalliance*."

The manner in which Merrimount talked, the utter absence of any regret over the state of things he was describing, or affectation of superiority, but as if there was in this progress to an advanced condition to be commended rather than condemned, contrasted with what Dick thought was an arrogant assumption

that when the time came, in the young nobleman's judgment and pleasure, he had but to cast his hand-kerchief upon Bessie and carry her off, involved contradictions which Dick could not understand.

He listened to Merrimount and reasoned. He saw that the Englishman was a sincere, open, and frank young fellow, and finally concluded that the assumption arose from an appreciation of his own rank, which was so recognized at home that he was unconscious of a possibility of failure in any alliance which he might propose.

As it was, the day's association ended so far as Dick was concerned in a very much increased respect for the man in the nobleman. What he found to criticise in Merrimount was the result of training and education, rather than inherent qualities. He concluded that Englishmen were given to regard the marriage relation rather as a matter of convenience than as an affair of the heart—as a partnership to be entered into with a due regard to the advantages to accrue to both the contracting parties. It was only upon this ground that he could reconcile the fact that he talked of his mission to America without a single allusion to Bessie, and of Wallis, whose brightness and wit seemed to have greatly taken his fancy, in terms approaching admiration.

"Well," said Dick aloud to himself, after he had parted from the young nobleman on their return, "I can't make out just the particular kind of a beast he is. All I do know is that he is a good fellow—a first-rate good fellow—but all the same, I don't want him to walk off with Bessie, and he won't if I can help it."

While Dick and Merrimount were returning from West Point in the afternoon, Ransom, Bob, and Dennis Moore were in close consultation at Moore's rooms in Third Avenue.

Moore's story of the result of his inquiries at New-

ark, showed he had arrived at precisely the same end the detectives employed by Dick had.

"The affair," he said in concluding, "is in bad shape. If we could find where the Powers family had gone to, we could base some action on the knowledge. But here we are with our heads against a stone wall. So long as we know nothing about it, we can't make a stir, because we don't know at what moment the old woman may pop up, and not only upset our plans, but put us into trouble."

"The old woman is dead," said Ransom in his soft voice.

"Ah!" responded Moore argumentatively, "you don't know that for a fact. If you did it would be all right."

"But I do know it," persisted Ransom. "She is dead."

Moore and Bob looked at him inquiringly, astonishment in their glances.

"I have got a piece of news," he continued. "This afternoon I fell in with a party over in Broadway, and one of them happened to remark that he had followed the trade of a morocco-finisher all his life. I asked if he knew a James Powers in the same line. It turned out that he had learned his trade from him, but he said he was dead, and he went on to say that he left a widow and two daughters, but that the widow only lived a year after his death and died here in New York, and that he had been at her funeral. He said both daughters were married, but he didn't know their names or where they lived."

"Ah!" said Moore, "that helps somewhat."

"It helps a good deal," insisted Ransom.

"Not much," persisted Moore. "You see you are in the same position as to the daughters. You don't know where they are."

"They don't count in this game," was the positive

reply of Ransom. "See; Dugdale died in 1858; the Powerses left New York in the same year; Powers died fifteen years after, 1873; at the same time the eldest daughter was twenty years old. Therefore in 1858 she was five years old—too young to know anything about the adoption of the child of Dugdale. When she was old enough, the adoption must have been an old story with Powers and his wife, because the only interest they could have had in the child was to get rid of it. The game is ours."

Moore was thoughtful. Bob watched him eagerly.

"You are right," he finally said. "The element of risk is out of it. Everything seems to run in our favor. Old Barber is dead. Mrs. Tomlinson knows nothing that can spoil us. And the two Powers people are dead. Yes, we are safe for the next move. What is it?"

Ransom was silent for a long time, his head bent over the table at which he was sitting. His leadership was demonstrated in the respect the others paid his silence.

"You know," he said finally, as he lifted his head from the table, "when I was a kid, I worked in the office of the *Courier and Inquirer*. Edmund Dugdale worked in the same office, putting the papers into wrappers and addressing them. Now on the basis of that I mean to go to Mason, in answer to that advertisement of his, and claim I knew the man."

"Yes?" asked Bob anxiously, even impatiently, "and what then?"

"I will tell him that I used to run errands for him and go to his house; that I knew a woman named Tomlinson who took the baby; that I knew the Powerses and that if I can think of another name I can find who adopted the baby."

Again he was silent for a while.

"Well," he continued, "by degrees I can get to an old man who adopted the baby and can find Dugdale to present him to Mason."

"But who?" asked Moore; "you are not plain."

"I am not so glib with my tongue as you lawyers are," replied Ransom sarcastically. "You must wait until I tell you. You know Orton Pierson?"

"What, the lawyer disbarred a dozen years ago for being concerned in some forgeries of documents?"

"Yes."

"Well, what of him?"

"He will do for the man who adopted the Dugdale baby."

"The deuce," commented Moore doubtfully. "He doesn't stand well in this city."

"Suppose he don't. What's that to do with it? His wife's dead. He did have an adopted son, who ran away years ago and died in prison in Spain as Pierson and I and nobody else knows, three years ago, and besides the old man's handy with the pen."

"But will he go into the scheme?" asked Moore.

"He will do what I tell him."

"Have you talked to him about it?" asked Bob.

"Not yet. He'll do it. He's got little to say that isn't true. His wife got a baby from someone named Powers. That's one lie. Then he'll tell the story of the youngster he did have, of his running away and turning up three years ago. That's no lie. Bob turned up here three years ago and he can tell about his knocking about the world—in India and the rest of it, except those two years in France," he added, with a malicious grin.

Bob bit his cigar in a nervous, vicious manner, but maintained silence.

"The thing is easy," continued Ransom. "There ain't a big story to tell. There ain't much to learn. Bob here and Pierson can get together and make their stories fit in, and you, Moore, can get up two or three letters from Powers to Mrs. Pierson, which old Pierson can copy and fix up as if they were old ones, don't you see?"

"And I am to be young Dugdale, am I?" asked Bob viciously.

"Yes," replied he of the soft voice calmly, with his eyes sternly fixed on the young man. "When you get done being Harold Pierson. That will be a good deal better than being Allan Mark Everard."

"Now, drop that!" exclaimed the young man angrily. "I'm in this game and I'll see it out, but I won't take any joking from you. You've had your hands on me once, but it's for the last time. You mustn't look ugly at me, nor attempt to be my master. I'd as soon die as have such a hellhound as you are on top of me for my life. Meet me as your equal, or, by Heaven, I'll put daylight through you if I swing for it!"

Ransom leaped to his feet, his eyes blazing and his face livid. With a spring forward, which had the liveness and stealthiness of a tiger in it, he reached for the young man's throat. But this time Bob was prepared. His left fist shot straight from his shoulder full into the face of Ransom, who went down like a log. The blow and the fall stunned him. Moore, thoroughly frightened, grasped a water-jug and threw its contents over Ransom's face. The shock revived him, and with restored consciousness he realized instantly what had occurred. His face was hideous under the workings of his awful passion. He made a violent effort to arise. The younger man's passion was as great. With his foot he sent Ransom to the floor again, standing over him with a wicked knife in his hand.

With a frightful oath, uttered from between his teeth, Bob cried:

"You've been working up the devil in me for a long time, and by Heaven, if you stir a hand or say a word, I'll put this knife through your heart!"

Ransom knew he was at the mercy of the younger man. Looking up into Bob's eyes, he saw a most dan-

gerous light blazing in them—a murderous, desperate, fiendish light—and he knew he had for once met a spirit which, when aroused, was more wicked than his own. For the first time since Bob had fallen under his influence he respected him. Flat on his back he could not look upward without encountering those gleaming eyes. He was compelled to turn away from the murderous blaze, from that handsome face, horrible now under the workings of a terrible passion which convulsed it. He looked to Moore, who was standing by, frightened into helpless impotence. The look recalled Moore to himself.

"This is no way to begin business," he said in answer to the prostrate man's appeal. "Bob, let Ransom up."

He put his hand upon the younger man's shoulder, and, finding he was not repulsed, gently urged him into his chair. Then he assisted Ransom to arise. While this was being done, the younger man never removed his eyes from the face of Ransom, but remained holding his knife in his hand in a threatening manner.

There was a rap at the door. Moore hastened to it. Someone hearing the noise came to ask if an accident had occurred. Assuring the inquirer that one of his visitors had fallen without injury to himself he closed the door again. The two men were sitting on opposite sides of the room glaring at each other when he turned.

"Well," said Moore, perceiving that active hostilities had ceased. "What does this mean? Does the whole thing drop because you two have quarreled?"

"I have not quarreled," replied Ransom, forcing himself into composure.

Gaining courage as he proceeded, Moore took upon himself the rôle of peacemaker.

"Someone has," he said. "Put up that knife, Bob; Ransom won't hurt you."

"No, I don't think he will," answered the young

man, with an oath. "But he must learn I am not to be fooled with. I know he has got the head and I am willing to follow him, but that don't make me his slave. He mustn't treat me as such. If he has got his lesson we can go on with the business."

While Ransom realized that he had at last met one he had cause to stand in fear of, he also realized that it would never do to permit Bob, or anyone else in fact, to see such was the case, for his leadership among his companions was yielded him quite as much by reason of the fear he excited as by reason of the recognition of his mental superiority.

He therefore arose from his chair and walked toward the young man. He did not intend to be menacing in his manner, but he overacted his part. Bob sprang to his feet, pulled his knife and cried with a frightful oath:

"Have I got to kill you before you know me?"

Moore sprang between them, but Ransom put him aside and said sternly: "Bob, put up your toothpick. You're making a fool of yourself. Let us get to business."

It no doubt required a great deal of brute courage to pass within arm's length of that murderous knife, held by an enraged man, but he did so without a quiver, and passed on to the table, at which he sat himself with his back to the young man, and took up a pencil.

"Where does this man Mason live, Bob?" he asked calmly.

The coolness and self-possession, as well as the indifference to his passion, displayed by Ransom, calmed Bob by surprising him and indeed secured his admiration. He was so long in replying that Ransom was compelled to repeat his question.

"At No. —— East Twenty-eighth Street."

"What's his business place?"

"No. —— Cliff Street, Hetlow, Altmount & Co.

"I'll bring Pierson here to-morrow night," he said to Moore; then turning to the young man, he said: "You be here at eight o'clock to-morrow night, Bob; I shan't see you until then."

Without another word he took his hat and went out of the door. Moore and the young man listened to him as he slowly and deliberately descended the stairs. They listened until they heard the front door close upon him, when Moore, turning to the young man, said with a laugh in which there was the quality of relief.

"What a hothead you are!"

"It was coming," replied Bob, in a surly tone. "He must learn that I've been a gentleman once, if I am crooked now. I won't take anything from him. I'm not a slave."

"Well, you frightened him for once in his life."

"No, I didn't," replied Bob; "he didn't weaken once. He stopped because it would interfere with business."

"You're mistaken," persisted Moore. "For the first time in his life Ransom was frightened. From this out he will fear you. He will pretend he doesn't and perhaps will act so, but he's afraid of you."

"Do you think so?" said the young man with a glad, proud glance in his eyes.

"I know it. Now don't you go to trading on it but hold your grip now you've got it."

Moore was not displeased to find that there was one among them, of whom the man who had terrorized over them all stood in fear.

CHAPTER XI.

PLAYING THE KNAVE.

MASON, after his excursion to West Point with Lord Merrimount, was depressed and apprehensive. Everything tended to confirm him in the belief that the young nobleman's mission was to secure the hand of Bessie, provided she was in fact the heir to the Dugdale millions. Though he was quite certain, after his conversation with Merrimount, that no sentiment was involved in the young nobleman's plans, and that he paid no more attention to Bessie than any polite and well bred young man would do, being a guest in her father's house, still he did not fail to recognize the formidable character of the rivalry he was certain to encounter. On Merrimount's side was ambition, rank, distinction, and the sanction of the father, family influence, and the pressure of opinion within the circle in which Bessie moved. These influences, he thought, even exerted passively, would be influential, and, he feared, controlling. While upon his own side, was only his deep and passionate love for Bessie, not even declared, and which, if declared, would doubtless meet with the determined opposition of Mr. Hetlow. And over and above all was the growing conviction that the prospect of sudden and vast enrichment was having a baleful influence upon Bessie herself. The only course open to him to follow, which would seem to lead to anything like success, was a vigorous prosecution of the search for young Dugdale, the successful end of which seemed now to be far away.

It was thus that he was musing, as he was seated

at his desk in his office, when a messenger announced to him that a man named Ransom desired to see him.

"Admit him," said Dick, arousing himself from his gloomy reverie.

When his visitor entered he was distinctly conscious of a feeling of distrust and aversion. But as unfavorable as was the first impression, no sooner did Ransom reveal his business than all such sensations were lost in the eager desire to know what Ransom had to tell.

"For some days," Ransom began, as he seated himself in the chair indicated by Dick, "I have been noticing advertisements in the papers, asking anyone having knowledge of Edmund Dugdale to call upon you. I suppose I am speaking to Mr. Richard Mason?"

Dick eagerly assured him that he was.

"Well, the man is dead," briefly continued Ransom.

"We know that," murmured Dick, "and that he died in 1858, but we want to know all we can about his life and associations when he was alive."

"It is very little I can tell you," said Ransom. "That's what kept me from coming before—I had so little to say. But that 'ad' kept turning up before me and so I thought I'd come."

"Anything, however trivial it may appear to you, might be important to us," urged Dick.

"Well, I was a boy," Ransom went on, as he crossed his legs and supported his elbows on the arms of the office chair, bringing the tips of his fingers together, thus attracting Dick's attention to his beautiful white hand, "I was a boy, I say, in the office of the *Courier and Inquirer*, when Dugdale was employed there, and sometimes ran errands for him. That's the way I got to going to his rooms. He lived in Macdougall Street. He was a shy, reserved fellow, as I recollect him, and very poor."

"All you say comports with the information we

have received," remarked Dick. "Did you know the name of the people with whom he lodged in Macdougall Street?"

"Yes; the name was Powers. I knew the family. I think he went to lodge there through me. Powers was a morocco-finisher, and soon after Dugdale's death moved to Newark. He died there some nine or ten years ago. His wife is dead, too."

"She dead, too!" exclaimed Dick, much disappointed.

"Yes, she died a year after Powers. Died here in New York. They had two daughters, both married. I don't know what has become of them."

"Did you know of any intimate friends that the Dugdales had?"

"Well, unless you could call a Mrs. Tomlinson and a man named Barber, who were in the theatrical line, friends, I don't think they had any. I saw an item in the paper the other day about an old man named Barber who had been a ballet-dancer, who died, and I've been wondering if that fellow was the same one."

"Yes, he was the same man," answered Dick. "Do you know whether Mrs. Tomlinson is alive and, if she is, where she lives?"

"I do not. I don't know anything more about her, than that she cared for Dugdale's baby a good deal after Mrs. Dugdale's death."

"Oh, then you know there was a child?"

"Oh, yes."

"It disappeared before the father's death, didn't it?"

"No, it didn't disappear. The Tomlinson woman took it."

"It disappeared after the father's death."

"No; the Tomlinson woman brought it back to the Powers people and they put it out for adoption to someone."

"Do you know to whom?"

"Well, I heard the name at the time, but I've forgotten it now."

By this time Dick had taken the hook firmly. Ransom had played his part with great skill. He had not known too much, and he had not been eager to recollect too much. And it was just about what the recollections of a boy, having the relations to Dugdale he described himself to have, would naturally have been.

With no little excitement Dick asked if it were not possible for him to arouse his memory on that point, which he told Ransom was the essential point.

"Perhaps," replied Ransom doubtfully; "it's a good many years since I thought of these things. Perhaps I might. I can try. It runs in my head that the man was a lawyer."

"We have heard he was in the shipping business."

"Who says that?" asked Ransom sharply and quickly.

Had Dick not been so much engrossed with his own thoughts, he would have noticed the difference in tone and the sudden alertness of Ransom's eyes, in sharp contrast with his carefully preserved expression of indifference. As it was, he did not even heed the question, but went on to say:

"I wish you would try to recollect the name. And we should be very glad to—to pay you for—the trouble you have been put to."

Ransom, however, refused this, and somewhat brusquely. He went away saying he would try to recollect, and if he did he would write to Mr. Mason.

As he reached the door, he met Mr. Stanton entering. The old lawyer looked Ransom steadfastly in the face as they passed, and on joining Dick at his desk, said:

"That is a thoroughpaced rascal, if there ever was one. Who is he?"

"Rascal or not," lightly laughed Dick, highly

pleased, "he brings most valuable information. He knew the Powerses as well as Dugdale. He says that both Powers and his wife are dead. He knows of the adoption of the child, and, though he has now forgotten the name of the person taking it, thinks he can in time recall it."

"What does he want for his information?" grumbled Mr. Stanton.

"Nothing," replied Dick. "Rather, he resented the idea of being paid."

"Umph!"

The old lawyer's intuitions warned him to distrust the man and his professions. The fact that Ransom's face was a bad one did not, after all, argue his information was not of value. He questioned Dick closely as to what Ransom had said, and at the end added:

"If true, what he says is valuable. Part of it we know to be true, possibly it may all be true. But act with great caution on all he says."

He sat silent for some moments, and then began abruptly:

"I have something to say to you, Mason. I suppose people would call it a delicate matter, but you are a sensible man, and when you hear what I have to say and my reasons, I don't think you will take offense, but will meet me in the same manly spirit I am approaching you in."

Although their acquaintance was of short duration, comparatively, still they had been thrown together so frequently and closely that Dick had become accustomed to the old lawyer's odd and abrupt manners. Moreover, he had a sincere and respectful liking for Mr. Stanton. So he replied:

"I shall not resent anything you may say to me, Mr. Stanton."

"Well," continued the lawyer, "here it is. When you first began to come to our place, from the way you and Wallis drifted together, the idea occurred to me

that you had an attraction for each other. I was satisfied. I had formed a good opinion of you, and the inquiries touching your habits and character, which I thought in the interest of Wallis it was my duty to make, confirmed it."

Dick was highly amused, but he did not interrupt Mr. Stanton.

"But last night Mrs. Stanton informed me I was wholly mistaken. From Wallis she had learned that you entertained an affection for Hetlow's girl—an affection of long standing which is reciprocated by Bessie, but opposed by Hetlow. And that the motive lying at the bottom of your search is the obtaining of Hetlow's consent."

"There is truth and error in your statement," interjected Dick.

"Permit me to state my case," urged Mr. Stanton. "Now I have thrown myself heartily into the effort to assist you in this search, and I am giving you aid and comfort by having you at my house. I am a neighbor of Mr. Hetlow, and have made professions of friendship for him. I don't want to be placed in a false position. While pretending to be his friend, I don't want to be open to the charge of playing a treacherous part, as I would be, if knowing of your suit and his opposition, I were to continue to afford you the opportunity to communicate with Bessie. I don't want you to stop coming to my house. You are only too welcome. But, if this statement is a true bill, I want permission to explain my position to Hetlow. I didn't want to say these things to you in my own house, so I have come to you here, for a frank understanding between us."

Notwithstanding Dick's assurance in the beginning that he would take no offense, he nevertheless did feel his heat rising as the old lawyer talked. But making the effort to curb his annoyance, he was enabled to think upon the matter calmly for a moment or two,

and when he did, he saw clearly that Mr. Stanton was right in the position he had assumed.

"I will have to state the matter as it really is," Dick said, after a moment's reflection. "It is true that I have an affection for Bessie Hetlow. It is of long standing. It would be difficult for me to tell when that attachment did not exist. It began when I first met her, when she was a child and I a mere boy. Uncle Tom, who secured me a place with Hetlow, Altmount & Co., was an old and attached friend of Mr. Hetlow. As I say I used to go to the Hetlow house. My love for Bessie has been the best sentiment of my heart all these years—perhaps my incentive to win a place for myself. But whether that sentiment is reciprocated, I am unable to state. Not long ago I flattered myself it was, but recently certain events have led me to doubt whether her interest in me is any more than a friendly one, born of long acquaintance. While I have been at no pains to conceal the regard I have for her, I have said no words of love to her, nor have I asked for her love in return. Mr. Hetlow does not disapprove of my suit, for no suit has been actually made. He does not oppose, because, if for no other reason, he does not imagine there is anything to oppose. I have the right, at this time, to assume that he will make no opposition. The idea that he would make opposition is based upon the fact that, a few years ago, Mr. Hetlow intimated to me that it was not the proper thing for a junior clerk to seek to enter his employer's house upon terms of social equality. I resented this, in the only way I could, by refusing to enter his house at all, except when business requirements compelled it. At the time, I could not see why a boy could be admitted to the run of the house, and a junior clerk could not. When I was older I reasoned that Mr. Hetlow saw danger likely to arise from permitting a young man to associate with a young lady, his daughter, when there was none while

they were boy and girl. This being the true interpretation of his meaning, it followed logically that he opposed even the possibility of an interest growing up between Bessie and myself. True, I am not now a junior clerk. I am the head of the most important department of the house, and, it is not too much to say, the trusted lieutenant of the house. I have been advanced rapidly, and by the favor of Mr. Hetlow. True also that within a few days I have been invited to his table upon terms of social equality, but you will please mark this fact—at a time when a most eligible suitor, who can offer to his bride the highest social distinction, is in the house, ostentatiously there with the approval of the father as a preferred suitor.

"Now," continued Dick, "as to the search. I did not seek to make it. I did not even offer my services. I was requested to undertake it, and in such manner that, had I refused to comply, my refusal would have been taken as a reflection upon Mr. Hetlow. I will confess to you that I was alarmed at the prospect of Miss Hetlow's inheriting all this money. I saw that with such immense wealth she would move into circles and into conditions which would put her beyond my reach. But whether or not that consideration had weight with me, the fact remains I was instructed to undertake the search—an energetic search, leaving nothing undone, and to protect the honor of Mr. Hetlow against himself, who feared he might be betrayed into failing to exert all the requisite energy. The further fact is patent. Whatever may be the motives inspiring me to successful effort, the result of my labors is in the line of Mr. Hetlow's desires and tends to an entirely proper end. I am not enough of a moral philosopher to get beyond the facts. It may be argued that having so direct an interest in the finding of Dugdale, I should not be engaged in the effort. If that is so, it is a matter which is between myself and my honor; it does not touch the end sought by Mr.

Hetlow. More than that—influenced as I am, though Dugdale is not found, there is assurance in the fact that nothing has been left untried or undone to find him. And here I will also confess, that since Lord Merrimount has presented himself as a conditional suitor for the hand of Bessie, and believing as I do that he will return without a formal request for her hand if Dugdale is found, I have redoubled my energies."

As he talked Dick had been sitting at his desk with his left arm leaning upon it, as he gesticulated with his right. On reaching this point, he rose to his feet, and standing upright before Mr. Stanton, who was still seated, with an expression of stern determination on his face, from which it was usually his trained habit to chase all expression, he said firmly:

"I will further say that I love Miss Hetlow with all my strength, and notwithstanding the fact that at present, she seems to regard me with disfavor, and notwithstanding that I believe Mr. Hetlow will oppose our union if the proposition is submitted to him, and notwithstanding the presence of Lord Merrimount, I will do all that becomes a man to win her heart and her hand."

As he said this he saw the shadow of a woman starting swiftly past the painted glass which formed part of the partition which made his individual office, but he was too much engrossed in his own words to heed it.

The old lawyer arose with an expression of admiration upon his face, but his words were at variance with such admiration.

"Your statement of the case differs widely from that which I received," he said. "There is now a perplexing moral question in it. And there must arise to the lawyer's mind this point—moved as you are, is not Mr. Hetlow in danger of having a Dugdale presented to him?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Dick sternly.

"Nothing you need grow warm over," quickly replied Mr. Stanton. "I think I have judged you accurately enough to be assured that you would never be guilty of such an intrigue, but if this statement was presented to a lawyer, without knowledge of the kind of man conducting the search, the fear would instantly rise in his mind, that with such an incentive as you have admitted, there was a danger to be guarded against—that an heir would be presented, whether Dugdale was alive or dead, discovered or undiscovered."

Dick turned pale under this suggestion.

"I never thought of such a thing," he gasped faintly.

"I know you never did," said Mr. Stanton, with a laugh. "The very fact that you have been frank enough to confess your motives puts that supposition out of the case. Don't let that worry you, but go on with your work. As the matter stands I do not see that I am called upon to interfere. I will stand by you at every turn of the matter."

Putting out his hand he took Dick's in a strong grasp, and said :

"As you are protecting the honor of Mr. Hetlow against himself, I will protect your honor against yourself. Don't let this free talk alter any of the present conditions."

He departed, leaving Dick considerably shaken by the interview. Shortly after, Dick went into the street, and in time to receive from Bessie Hetlow a polite recognition as she entered the carriage with her father.

CHAPTER XII.

A PERVERSE MAIDEN.

DAYS passed, and as nothing was heard from Ransom, Dick began to lose faith, and addressed himself with greater energy to spreading far and wide advertisements calling for information as to the Powerses.

During this time he had several conversations with Mr. Hetlow upon the subject of the search, and he thought he had discovered a suppressed impatience upon the part of the old merchant that no conclusion was reached. In the last one the merchant had said:

“The time must come when further search will not only be useless, but unjust to my daughter. I am convinced that I will be justified in taking steps to place my daughter in possession of the property, if, at the expiration of a year from the time the search was undertaken, no trace of young Dugdale is found.”

It was clear Mr. Hetlow did not believe the search would result in finding the heir.

Dick made no response to this remark. Noting what he conceived to be the growing impatience of Mr. Hetlow, he attributed it to a desire to further the possible alliance between the houses of Mountchessington and Hetlow, which would only become probable in the event of Bessie's inheriting the property.

As disturbing as the thought was, he nevertheless took comfort in the implied promise that he should have a full year in which to work out this problem, although further disturbed by a fear as to what the consequences might be of a close and daily association between Lord Merrimount and Bessie, should the

young nobleman continue to be the guest of Mr. Hetlow during that year.

Five days had passed since he and Mr. Stanton had had their free talk, and he had heard nothing from the old lawyer. He was sitting at his desk in his office endeavoring to invent some valid excuse for his going to Spring Hill, when a letter from Wallis was put into his hands. Mr. Stanton desired to see him and had instructed Wallis to write him, suggesting that Dick should put in an appearance as soon as possible and come prepared for a stay of several days.

Tortured as he was by doubts as to the sentiment of Bessie with regard to himself, and by fears as to the influence Merrimount's daily contact would exert upon her, he eagerly determined to comply, and to carry the acceptance of Mr. Stanton's invitation in his own person and at once.

As a consequence he arrived at Spring Hill at an hour when he was not expected. The family were gone upon a day's excursion on the river, upon Mr. Hetlow's steam yacht. This, however, led to no embarrassment, for he was already on the footing of a frequent and favored guest in the Stanton household. Left to his own amusement he started out for a stroll. His thoughts tended naturally and inevitably to the misunderstanding which had arisen between himself and Bessie, and as to what could be done to bring matters back to the old ground. Though Wallis had confidently promised to clear the atmosphere, apparently she had failed. And because of this apparent failure Dick concluded that her interpretation of Bessie's singular attitude to himself was not the true one, and that there was some other reason, of which neither he nor she had a conception.

As he strolled on he also determined that while he was staying at Spring Hill he would seek an opportunity to bring matters to an issue; to force an explanation from Bessie, and to demand from her the

right and occasion to defend himself. If the offense Bessie held he had committed was explainable, he would explain it; if he had unwittingly offended her, he would admit the offense and apologize; if she were obdurate and resolved to end their relations, he would bow to the inevitable, and retire from further struggle against her injustice, but he would no longer continue in the condition of doubt and anxiety which had become torture to him.

As he thus planned his course, he had wandered in the direction of the river, and had reached the rocks, beyond the tunnel overhanging the water. The shining river placidly flowing under the sun and bearing the lazy sail upon its bosom, unruffled by the slightest breath of wind, presented a restful picture and invited him to the contemplation of a repose to which his mind had been a stranger for many days. Yielding to its influence, he rested his elbows upon a jutting rock extending beyond the line of the shore, and with his head upon his hands dreamily viewed the peaceful scene.

His attention, however, was taken by a discordant shout beneath him, and looking down, he saw a small rowboat, with three men in it, one of whom was standing in the bow, ready to spring on to land when the boat reached the shore. Though the distance was great, he thought he recognized in the standing man one employed by Mr. Hetlow at "The Larches," who had impressed himself upon him by his ill-favored face. The man who was pulling the bow oar turned his head to see how the other would make his landing, thus presenting a side face to view, when with a start Dick thought he recognized the features of Ransom, who had called upon him five days previously. At this moment the man lifted his head, saw Dick, turned away quickly, and though the one who had leaped to shore turned his face to those in the boat, the man at the bow oar said something to the other and they pulled sharply

into the river, turned, and in an instant were lost to view behind a projecting boulder.

Why the incident, which was not a significant one, should have caused the sensation Dick was conscious of experiencing, and just what that sensation was, Dick would have been put to great trouble to explain. Reflection showed him that he was by no means sure the man was Ransom, and even if it were, there was no reason to regard it as important, or as having any bearing upon the matter he had in hand. The direct effect of it was, however, to divert him from the peaceful scene, and he wandered on. Turning a point of the rock along which he knew there was a path, and among which rocks there was a recess and a natural seat much favored by Wallis, he suddenly came upon the one who had to such an extent occupied his thoughts that afternoon.

When she looked up to see who was the intruder upon her solitude, it was evident she was as much surprised to look upon him as he was to find her there. He had supposed she was with the yachting party. She had no knowledge he was expected at Spring Hill.

As he saluted her, he expressed surprise that she was not upon the river with her father. On her part she replied, with some constraint of manner, that a severe headache had prevented her going in the morning, but recovering, she had strolled out for the air in the afternoon.

Here was the opportunity ready made for which Dick had only ten minutes previously firmly determined he would diligently seek. Yet, now that it was precipitated upon him, from being a young man noted for the promptness with which he seized passing opportunities, he passed into one without wits and with nothing to say.

Perhaps it was his silence which embarrassed Bessie, for neither could she find words for a tongue usually most voluble. The situation was awkward. Realizing

this, Dick essayed to relieve it, and rushed into his first blunder.

"I had determined," he said, after an effort, "on coming here to seek from you an explanation of your singular conduct toward myself."

Bessie resented the adjective. While the awkward silence had lasted she had been looking up the river, her face averted, but, with Dick's words, she lifted it to him, her color rising and indignation shining in her lovely blue eyes. It was so like a man to charge upon a woman a fault that was his own. She had only resented his *singular* treatment of herself, in a proper and womanly spirit.

"Singular!" she repeated, sarcasm in her tones. "I did not know people regarded my conduct as singular."

"It has been to me," replied Dick, noting with admiration how pure was the profile of her face outlined against the dark deep blue of the sky. "I have been made to feel keenly the weight of your displeasure—"

He hesitated long enough to give Bessie the suggestion that he was selecting his words with care.

"And," he went on, "so far as I am able to perceive, without good or sufficient reason."

Poor Dick! he had stumbled from one blunder into another. In his nervousness, and in his determination to arrive at an understanding, nerving himself for an effort, he had assumed a severity of tone and a sternness of manner he was far from intending.

"Perhaps," said Bessie, straightening herself up with an excess of dignity, "before we enter upon that explanation you are so pleasantly" (severe stress on "pleasantly") "demanding, you will inform me who conferred upon you the authority you so frequently exercise to censure and reprimand me?"

"I censure you—reprimand?" stammered Dick, overwhelmed, "surely you do not accuse me of such audacity."

"You have just chosen to tell me my conduct is singular—that I have conducted myself without reason," returned Bessie, following up sharply her advantage. "And, the last time we conversed alone, you informed me I was sordid, grasping, avaricious; possessing an unholy ambition to shine in circles beyond me; willing, in order to achieve such ambitions, to seize riches which did not belong to me; that I was opposed to a search for the rightful heir, and that in your high devotion to duty you would exert all in your power to find the man, so as to save me from myself."

Dick stared at her, dumb in his amazement. He was aghast at the ingenuity with which she perverted the words used in that heated interview.

"One would suppose," continued Bessie, "that having so low an estimate of a woman, any words of explanation she might utter would have no weight with you. So detestable a creature as I must appear to you should be without sufficient interest to induce you to desire any intercourse with her."

"Interest?" weakly repeated Dick, as if he was grasping at the only significant word she had uttered.

"But," Bessie went on, "whether or not I am all you suppose me to be, and you have not wasted delicacy in your effort to leave me in no doubt as to your opinion, I deny your authority to rebuke or to criticise me."

Dick gathered himself together with an effort. Several moments passed before he spoke, and when he did it was in gentle tones and with a most respectful air.

"I must have another existence of which I am not now conscious."

She turned to him puzzled.

"I do not understand you," she said.

"Unlike Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, who always retained consciousness of the other existence, I do not; for I have no recollection of the other Mason who has said these things."

"Do you mean to say you did not say them to me?" she asked indignantly.

"By no means. I mean to say that I am not now conscious of the existence of myself when I did say them."

"Which is only your polite way of telling me that I am untruthful," she broke in hotly.

Yet, when Bessie gave utterance to these words, which she knew would wound him, she wounded herself, for she saw that Dick was endeavoring to evade a contest with her, and she was fully aware she had put a perverse construction upon their former conversation the facts did not warrant. Moreover, they were just what she did not want to utter. But she could not restrain herself. Oh! If he would only go away, so that she could have a good cry, and then come back to her, how easily matters could be smoothed. But there he obstinately remained, seeking words to placate her and make her listen to reason. She knew well what he was striving to do. She was angry with herself that she could not abandon her mood and give him that assistance she dearly desired to give, and so she visited her anger upon him.

All this time he was leaning against the rock, his face very sober and very anxious, and his eyes very troubled. He was too earnest and too much engrossed to think of his attitude, but Bessie did not fail to recognize its unstudied grace, and she thought she had never seen him looking so handsome. She pitied him from the bottom of her heart for the trouble he was in—the trouble which was of her own making. Then she knew that she loved him deeply. Why would he not see this? Why would he not rise up in his wrath and bid her to silence? Why would he not take that mastership over her which was his to take, and to which she would yield, only too willingly, if he would but exert it? She had no patience with him. Why had he not the address to see that she wanted him to take the very authority she denied him?

"I had hoped," he said after a while, deliberately and sadly, "that when the opportunity presented itself, I would be enabled to induce you to tell me wherein I had given you offense. I am unconscious of having done so. If I have, it was unwittingly done. If any words I may have said to you can be construed into the meaning you have placed upon them, I can only say such meaning was far, far indeed from my intention. I do not think these things of you. I have never thought such things, and there can never be a time when, clothed in my right mind, I could think such things of you. I can make no apology, for I cannot make an apology for something I never did. I can only regret that I have used words that could be construed into such meaning. Even now I am unable to recall them. I think, however, that I must have given you offense in other ways. If I have, I would like to know how, that I may either explain, defend myself, or apologize if I am in the wrong. Could you but know with what respect and esteem I regard you, you would understand how impossible it is for me to wittingly offend you. Regard! It is a cold word, which does not reveal my sentiments. If you could but know—if you would but believe in—the strong, enduring, unconquerable love I bear to you and have always borne to you, you would know that I would see this right arm wither in the fire, before I would utter one word, or do a single act, which would give you a moment's distress."

He held out his arm straight before her, looking over it earnestly into her face. While she, quivering with joy and trembling on the brink of tears, turned her face away to conceal her emotions.

He thought her action meant obduracy, and so, letting his arm fall slowly to his side, he went on:

"You do not heed me. You are not cold. It is I who am unfortunate. But the past cannot be taken from me. The dreams of the days when hope in-

spired me to efforts to make myself worthy of your love are burned into my memory. My love, unreciprocated as it may be, is mine. That cannot be taken from me. And I can still indulge the hope that you will see that justice to me, who have been guilty of but one wrong, and that of daring to love you, demands that I be given the opportunity to defend myself against your belief in my offense."

He waited for her to speak, but she could not trust herself. She sat like one entranced, her whole being flooded with light, her tongue dumb.

"I will wait and ask again for justice," he said. "And I think I know you too well to believe you will deny me so small a boon."

She heard the gravel crushing under his feet and thought he was coming to her. But he did not come. She slowly turned. He was gone. She sprang up, with a wild yearning in her heart. She saw him slowly going from her over the soft, yielding sod. She stretched out her arms appealingly, as if she would call him back, and then, flinging herself against the hard, flinty bosom of the unsympathetic rock, she gave her heart up to a storm of sobs, heard only by the soft winds stopping to toy with her golden tresses shining in the western sun.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RED SHAWL.

CRUSHED and hopeless, Dick went his way, caring little where he wandered. Yet he had won his love. He had achieved his heart's dearest desire, and was not aware of it. He was quite certain the sun was blotted from his heaven, that all purpose was gone from his life. He knew now what influence his love for Bessie had exerted upon his life, shaping its course and giving direction and energy to his efforts. And as he stalked away with crushed heart and lowered head, fatuous and despairing, he left behind him, concealed by the rocks, a maiden weeping bitterly because the conqueror to whom she had surrendered the empire of her soul had failed to take possession of it by right of conquest.

In time Dick reached the Stanton residence and sat himself down in one of the broad-armed chairs on the veranda and gave himself up unreservedly to gloom and despair.

From his reverie, after a long time, he was aroused by the sound of steps upon the gravel walk. Looking up his eyes fell upon a woman, not yet of middle age, evidently strange to her surroundings, making her way toward the entrance at which he was sitting. Although apparently of humble life, her appearance suggested thrift and prosperity, and her face was attractive because of its frankness no less than its comeliness. Notwithstanding his gloomy frame of mind, it was with difficulty that Dick repressed a broad smile when

he noticed that her hair was blonde and her shawl a fiery red.

As she reached the foot of the flight of steps leading to the door she inquired for Mr. Stanton.

When Dick informed her that he was not at home, an expression of deep disappointment settled upon her honest face.

"I have come all the way from New York to see Mr. Stanton," she replied, as she accepted Dick's invitation to seat herself. "I didn't want to come, but they urged so hard that I did. And they told me I'd be sure to find Mr. Stanton at home."

Dick was on the point of inquiring who "they" were, when it occurred to him that he might be obtruding himself upon private affairs, and he withheld his questions. But the woman enlightened him without the necessity of inquiries from him.

"They didn't know at his office what Mr. Stanton wanted to see me about, but they said he was very anxious to see me about something. It is all along of an advertisement they put into the papers, asking any who knew James Powers to communicate with them."

Now Dick was interested. A few moments before he had determined to withdraw from the search, but so strong is the fascination of the chase, that upon the first scent he was all eagerness.

"Of course," he said, "you are alluding to Stanton, Boyd & Stevens, and you are the daughter of James Powers."

The hazard was a correct one, as Dick perceived by the astonished expression of her face.

"It is all right," continued Dick. "I am the one you want to see. Mr. Stanton inserted that advertisement for me. I am the one who wanted to talk with anyone who knew James Powers. My name is Mason. Are you the married daughter?"

"Both of us are married now, sir. I am the oldest. My name is Jenkins now. We live in Philadelphia.

After we saw the piece in the papers, my husband said I'd best go on. It might be important."

"It is," replied Dick. "Most important. When you were four or five years old, and your father and mother lived in MacDougall Street, they had a lodger named Dugdale, who died there and left a child, which your mother cared for until it was adopted by some persons unknown to me. Do you recollect anything of this?"

"I recollect hearing my mother telling the story."

"Is your mother alive?"

"No, sir; she's been dead nine years, father ten."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dick, beginning to have more trust in Ransom by reason of this confirmation. "Do you recollect the name of the person who adopted the child?"

"No, sir; I do not. I don't know that I ever heard it."

By this time Dick perceived that Mrs. Jenkins was greatly disappointed as to the business she was called on. Rightly judging that imagination had suggested to these good people the possibilities of advantages to themselves, to accrue from the inquiry which had been put on foot, Dick with ready tact bent himself to enlist her interest.

With some reservations, dwelling upon the high connections of her mother's lodger and the immense fortune awaiting the child her mother had cared for, Dick told the story, winding up with the statement that he knew she had been put to trouble and expenses, for which she would be amply compensated. Having overcome her disappointment, he plied her with many questions. But nothing he did not already know was elicited. Failing on this tack, he tried to learn if there were not some persons still alive who might have knowledge of the adoption.

Mrs. Jenkins thought possibly an aunt, who lived with her father and mother about that time, might have

known about it, but she was old now and not very clear in mind.

Somewhat discouraged, Dick rather hopelessly asked if there was nothing in her possession which would throw light upon the subject.

Mrs. Jenkins thought a moment and then replied:

"There is a tin box at home that father used to keep his papers in. We've got it yet. I haven't looked into it in many a day, but all the papers are in it yet, excepting the deed for the Newark house, which was taken out when we sold the house. I will look when I go home."

Here at least was a chance. The Powers possibilities were not exhausted yet. So he earnestly requested her to do so, and, giving her his address in writing, asked her to inform him as promptly as she could as to what came of her search. Then taking from his pocket a roll of bills, he handed her a sum of money so large as to make her eyes glitter with delight.

It occurred to him that as thoroughly as he had questioned her, still, had Mr. Stanton been present, he might have been more successful, so he proposed that she should wait for Mr. Stanton's return.

To this she energetically demurred, saying that she must return by the six o'clock train, since her husband would be awaiting her upon its arrival. Consulting his watch, Dick found she could not reach the station in time if she were to walk, so he hastened to the stable and saw that a carriage was prepared to take her thither.

As he helped her into the carriage, he saw Mr. and Mrs. Stanton come up over the brow of the hill in the distance, but as time pressed he could not wait for them. He urged the driver to hasten to the depot. As the carriage rattled off, he saw Mrs. Stanton stop, as if her attention had suddenly been arrested, and then run forward to intercept the carriage by a short cut. He realized that Mrs. Stanton had at last found,

in the flesh, the blonde woman with the red shawl of her dreams, and he laughed aloud.

By the time Mr. Stanton reached him, perplexed and puzzled over the eccentric desertion of his wife, Mrs. Stanton, hot, panting, and flurried, was returning over the lawn, for the carriage had eluded her and passed out upon the highway before she could reach the turn where she had hoped to intercept it.

"What is all this?" asked the wondering lawyer.

"I've been making somewhat free with your belongings," answered Dick, smiling. "That was the first result from the inquiry after James Powers. The woman was compelled to return by the six o'clock train, and there was no way of getting her there in time but by sending the carriage."

"Oh, that was proper," said Mr. Stanton. "But what does she bring?"

Before Dick could reply Mrs. Stanton came up heated and indignant.

"I knew it! I knew it," she cried. "I knew if I waited she'd appear. I'm the most miserable of women! It is shameful! Right here in my own house, too! What is the meaning of this?"

"If you will keep quiet long enough you'll know," said Mr. Stanton, much annoyed. "Mason is about to tell."

Dick could preserve control of his gravity only by great effort when he saw Mrs. Stanton's expression, in which were blended indignation, incredulity, and curiosity.

Mastering his overpowering desire to laugh, he related what had passed between Mrs. Jenkins and himself, expressing the hope that an examination of the box would reveal what they so earnestly sought.

Nothing could exceed the fine scorn with which Mrs. Stanton regarded Dick as he finished the tale.

"And you expect me to believe that foolish story?" she exclaimed. "I am foiled again. You are too

sharp for me. What can a woman do against two such men?"

"What nonsense is this?" sharply asked the perplexed husband.

"It is no nonsense! That was the heart woman with a red shawl. I've been waiting for her to come that I might get at the bottom of all this talk about a baby and the Barbers and the Tomlinsons and the Powerses. Oh, yes! You may think you can fool me, but you cannot. I know what is under it. You may deceive Wallis, but you cannot deceive me. What is her name?"

She propelled this question abruptly at Dick.

Again with an effort Dick controlled himself.

"Her name is Jenkins," he replied. "She is the eldest married daughter of James Powers."

"Oh, she is," exclaimed the irate lady. "And the baby, where is that?"

"I am not aware that she has a baby," replied Dick, inwardly convulsed.

"Of course she hasn't one, if she put it out for adoption to someone she doesn't know, nor Mr. Stanton either. You wouldn't be turning the world upside down looking for it if it was with her."

"If you are going to be silly, go into the house," angrily commanded Mr. Stanton.

His wife, awed by his manner and tone, obeyed, but she walked away with the air of a martyr, leaving Dick convulsed with suppressed laughter.

Mr. Stanton, leading the way to the veranda, questioned Dick particularly as to his talk with Mrs. Jenkins.

"I wish I could have seen her," he said. "Yet it looks as if you had elicited all she had to tell. I am inclined to think more will be obtained from the aunt than from the box."

The conversation languished, and Dick asked for Wallis.

"She ran over to see Bessie Hetlow before coming

home. Bessie was sick with a headache this morning and did not go with us."

"Lord Merrimount is still at the Hetlows'?"

"Yes. He was with us to-day. He is a fine fellow. I like him. I don't favor, as a rule, American girls marrying these foreigners, but I think this would be a good thing for Bessie——"

He stopped short, recollecting Dick's affection for Bessie.

"I beg your pardon, Mason. I'd forgotten your interest in this matter."

"No pardon is necessary, sir," replied Dick sadly. "I am not so blind as not to see that Miss Hetlow's friends naturally think that Lord Merrimount, son of the Duke of Mountchessington, must be a much better alliance for her than would Dick Mason, a clerk in her father's office, with his way yet to make and his fortune yet to get. Do you consider the matter determined?"

"Why, bless me!" cried the old lawyer, his sympathies stirred by Dick's tone. "I know nothing about it. Hetlow has never said a word to me on the subject. I have fallen into the belief, if belief it is, from hearing everybody say so—everybody, that is, except Wallis. She insists that Bessie won't have him, if he offers himself. In fact she says Bessie's in love with you," bluntly added the old lawyer.

"Wallis is mistaken," said Dick quietly.

Mr. Stanton looked at him a moment seriously, but as the young man made no further remark took a cigar from his pocket, lit it, and smoked. Dick, in whom this conversation had revived sad thoughts, got up and walked the length of the veranda. As he reached the end, from which a view of the Hetlow mansion could be had, he observed Wallis turning the corner of the house. She saw him at the same moment.

"I want to see you. Come down," she commanded.

- Dick obeyed, and joined her on the lawn.

"What have you been doing to Bessie?" she asked imperiously.

"It would be better if you were to ask what Bessie has done to me," he replied.

"Well, what has she done?"

"She has rejected me. More than that, she has made me feel the sting of her contempt. She has shown me how wide is the gulf between her father's clerk and her father's daughter."

"When?"

"This afternoon."

"You think she has rejected you?"

"Think!" There was a world of sarcasm in his manner of repeating the word.

"I never saw such idiotic children," exclaimed Wallis, with a gesture of impatience. "I am thoroughly disgusted."

She threw off her hat, and sat herself down on the gnarled root of an old tree which protruded above the turf, and clasping her hands over one knee rocked herself gently to and fro, her brow gathered in wrinkles.

Dick, standing in front of her, thought she was very pretty as she sat there vexing herself with his troubles.

"To whom are you alluding?" he asked at length.

"To you and Bessie, of course," she answered with much asperity. "I never saw such idiots. You would go wrong, both of you, if there were a hundred ways to go right, and only one to go wrong."

Dick was silent, wondering what she meant, a slight hope springing up within him. She continued rocking herself to and fro.

"I don't know what is to be done," she said after a while. "If it were anyone else in the world I'd know what to do. But both of you are so stupid, you rush into a quarrel as soon as you're let loose. Such geese! Geese! A goose is a miracle of wisdom and penetration compared to you."

"I am surprised so astute a person as yourself should waste concern upon such idiots," remarked Dick, at last stung into a retort by her scorn.

"Now for goodness' sake!" impatiently cried Wallis, "don't add sarcasm to your other absurdities, when I am trying to see a way out of this miserable business. Do you know what Bessie is doing now?"

"Felicitating herself upon the easy manner in which she has rid herself of me, I presume," replied Dick, immediately feeling ashamed of his reply.

Wallis stopped rocking and looked up into his face most contemptuously.

"She is lying on her face sobbing as if her heart would break, because you had not the sense to know that she loves you with all her soul."

"Did she tell you so?"

"Did she tell me so!" Thus cried Wallis full of scorn. "No, she didn't tell me so."

"It is impossible after what occurred this afternoon."

"Tell me it! Tell me all! I want to judge."

Thus commanded, Dick did without reservation of any kind. Wallis listened intently with the air of sitting in judgment, frowning at times, and audibly expressing her disgust at others.

When he had finished, she said:

"And you didn't go to her after that and demand an answer, but stalked away in magnificent wrath!"

"It was useless. Her manner told me how she received my declaration. She turned her face from me."

"What did you want her to do? Fall at your feet and on her knees thank you for conferring upon her the priceless boon of your love? Whose part is it to woo? A pretty lover you are! Didn't you know she waited for you to come? Will men never understand women! You didn't know then that you had won Bessie, and that she was waiting for you to take her?"

"I knew nothing of the sort," said Dick firmly, satisfied he knew and Wallis didn't.

"Well," she added, rising as she heard the dinner bell, "we'll go to dinner, and I'll think what is best to be done. I do wish the good Lord had given you a little less of good looks and a little more of brains. I don't believe I'll ever get this straightened out."

Dick followed her quietly over the lawn, making no reply, for though he had been greatly irritated by Wallis's words, and especially her contempt, yet he knew they were the outcome of her deep interest in himself and Bessie. Notwithstanding the firmness of his belief in Bessie's determined rejection of himself, he felt lighter and more hopeful.

Mrs. Stanton had not recovered from her indignation over the appearance of the heart woman in a red shawl, but sat at the head of the table, in stately displeasure, from time to time interjecting remarks quite puzzling to Wallis, who had not yet been made aware of the afternoon's events.

During the dinner, Dick learned that a coaching excursion had been planned for the following day by Mr. Hetlow, and that he was expected to be of the party. He shook his head as if he proposed to decline. Wallis sharply informed him he was to go and without question, and that he must behave himself like a man, if that were possible—a doubt which received instant acquiescence on the part of Mrs. Stanton, if an active series of affirmative nods were to be taken as such acquiescence.

After dinner, Wallis informed him that he must get through the evening without her as best he could, as she had a duty to perform in going to Bessie, who was ill. Before she left she whispered to him:

"I have a plan. I think it will succeed. Now don't spoil everything by refusing to go to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV.

ORTON PIERSON.

WHEN Dick gave his promise to Wallis that he would be one of the coaching party he was sincere. At the first suggestion, thoughts of the embarrassment to result from a meeting with Bessie, so soon after what he considered to be his rejection, inclined him to a refusal. But he had been influenced by Wallis, despite his stubborn adherence to his own belief. Hope had sprung up within him, notwithstanding the surly entertainment he offered it. And in the end he had come to be eager for another meeting. But events conspired to alter the plans made for him.

When he came to the breakfast table the next morning, prepared for the excursion, he found his mail beside his plate. Wallis was at the table alone, and directing his attention to it, said:

“Your mail came in Mr. Hetlow’s bag from the office, and was sent over by him. While you read it, I will send for your coffee.”

Opening the first letter at his hand, he uttered an exclamation of surprise on reading it.

Wallis looked at him with curiosity, but did not speak.

“This letter,” he said, “has an important bearing on the search.”

Briefly relating to her the call of Ransom upon himself, and the little faith he had in anything to flow from it, he read the letter to her.

“Mr Mason: Dear Sir,” it began. “I have recollected the name of the man you want. It is Orton

Pierson. He lives somewhere uptown, in Harlem I am told. I heard also that his adopted son lives with him. He is a lawyer. I hope this is satisfactory. Yours, etc., Oliver Ransom."

"Oh," cried Wallis much interested, "will the property go to him, right away?"

Now that the result which, for the sake of Dick, she had hoped would be reached seemed accomplished, she began to have a great pity for Bessie and Lord Merrimount.

Before Dick could answer, Mr. and Mrs. Stanton entered, and Dick handed the letter to the old lawyer who read it deliberately. Laying it upon the table, he said:

"This looks like the beginning of the end."

"Yes, and it means I must go to New York at once."

"I suppose you should," said Mr. Stanton.

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Wallis. "All my nicely laid plans will be destroyed if you do."

"It will not do to delay," interposed the lawyer. "This is a very important matter."

He took up the letter again and studied it.

"This letter," he said, "impresses me more favorably than the writer did. It bears no evidence of being in relation with the Pierson people. He's a lawyer, eh? Pierson! Pierson! The name is familiar."

"Which is the lawyer?" asked Dick. "The old man or the son? The letter is capable of both constructions."

"So it is," replied Mr. Stanton referring to the letter. "Pierson! There was a lawyer of that name some years ago—eight or ten—disbarred for wrong practice—I don't know what. However, you should go at once. Your inquiries should be made before they get wind of the prize to be gained. You ought to know all about Pierson before you go to him. I'll

give you a letter to Boyd, my partner; he will know how to put you in information."

"I'll leave you to explain the matter to Mr. Hetlow," said Dick. "And I beg, Wallis, you will express my regrets to Miss Hetlow."

"It's very unfortunate," complained Wallis. "Why couldn't they have kept their letter until to-morrow!"

"One of the perverse peculiarities of duty is that it always interferes with pleasure," remarked Dick.

During the rest of the meal-time, Mr. Stanton dis-coursed upon the probabilities and possibilities of this information, giving Dick many suggestions as to his methods of proceeding in the matter and of dealing with Pierson. The meal was barely dispatched when a messenger from Mr. Hetlow announced that the coach would be ready to start in a very short time.

As Wallis rose from the table to prepare herself she passed Dick's chair, and stopped to say:

"I actually believe you are glad to escape going on this ride."

"Believe me, you are mistaken," answered Dick eagerly. "At first I was disinclined, for reasons you may appreciate, but after that I became anxious to go, and now I feel a deep sense of disappointment. You ought to see that while I can excuse my absence to Mr. Hetlow, I could not, in view of my commission from him, excuse my presence."

Wallis made no further protest, but expressed the hope that he would return as soon as circumstances would permit him.

In an hour Dick was on his way to the city. He entered the first drug store he could find, after leaving the cars, and consulted a directory.

A Mr. Orton Pierson resided and did business at No. — 128th Street—a real estate brokerage business. Having determined that such a person existed, Dick went at once to the office of Stanton, Boyd &

Stevens, and presented the letter written by Mr. Stanton to Mr. Boyd.

"Now what does Stanton want with that scamp?" inquired Mr. Boyd, after he had read the letter. "Pierson was disbarred twelve years ago. I know all about it. I was on the committee presenting the charges. Yes, he's in the real estate business, and I guess has done pretty well at it. He's a slippery old fellow, shrewd and plausible. If you are about to have any dealings with him, be on your guard. His reputation is bad."

Thus forewarned, Dick went up to 128th Street. He found that Orton Pierson conducted his real estate business in the basement of his dwelling. In this real estate office Dick found an elderly person, not ungentlemanlike in appearance, whose hair was white and long, and whose face was covered with a long white beard and mustache, who rose in a polite manner to greet him.

Having learned that the elderly gentleman was the person he sought, Dick proceeded to his business.

"I have some inquiries to make, Mr. Pierson," he began, "which at the outset may seem to be an impertinent interference in your private affairs."

Could Dick have observed the old man's eyes as he talked, he would have seen them suddenly light up with an alert expression, and as suddenly sink into dullness. But he could not, for their relative positions were such that a strong light was in Dick's face, while that of Mr. Pierson was in the shadow.

"Take a seat, sir," replied Pierson graciously. "You do not look like a man who would make impertinent inquiries, without good reasons."

Dick sat down, endeavoring to place his chair so that the light would not be so full upon him. But the old man, without seeming to do so, outmaneuvered him and their positions remained, sitting, as they had been standing.

"I desire to ask first," Dick continued, "if you have a son?"

"Yes," replied the old man, "I have a son. But if there is purpose in your question, I suppose to answer you properly, I should say he is an adopted son. But he is the same to me as one, for he was adopted when a babe, and it is only in recent years that he has known that he was not a son of my own blood."

"So much confirmation," thought Dick.

Aloud he asked:

"Did you obtain the child from an institution? Pardon me, I do not intend to be offensive."

"You are not, sir," blandly replied the old man. "No, the child did not come from an asylum. There is quite a story connected with our obtaining it. Mrs. Pierson, who is now dead, and I hope in Heaven where so good a woman should be, was strolling one day, a quarter of a century ago, in Union Square, and had her attention attracted to a pretty babe in the arms of a respectable woman. Mrs. Pierson had never been blessed with children but had a large mother heart. She stopped to notice it, and, chatting with the woman, learned that the babe was the child of a man, though a gentleman, very poor, and that the mother was dead. How the talk of adoption came up, I don't know, yet I recollect that Mrs. Pierson talked to me of adoption, but as I was not inclined, the matter was dropped for the time. The next summer, however, Mrs. Pierson again saw the woman and the babe, and learned that the child's father was dead and the babe homeless. Then it was that Mrs. Pierson persuaded me to go with her the next day to see it. Seeing it, I fancied it. We made a proposition to take the child, but Mrs. Tompkins—no, that wasn't the name—not Tompkins—Tomp—Tompkins—Tomlinson—that's it! but Mrs. Tomlinson said she could not dispose of the child until she had consulted her hus-

band, so we went away, with the understanding we were to hear from her upon the subject promptly. As a matter of fact, we never did hear from her again, nor have I ever heard of her since. But after a few days a man named Powers came to my office, telling me that Mrs. Tomlinson, compelled to leave town with her husband hastily, had turned the child over to his wife, with my address, and announced his readiness to make over the child if we were still of the same mind. To cut the story short the transfer was made and the child reared by us."

"How old is he now?" asked Dick, already convinced that he had at last ended his search.

"About twenty-seven, I think."

"What name does he bear?"

"Mine—Harold Pierson."

"Is he a young man of good habits?"

"As good as the average—perhaps better. He left me on a foolish misunderstanding shortly after Mrs. Pierson's death, six years ago, but returned three years ago. I do not see that his knocking about the world has harmed him. Upon the contrary, I think it has strengthened and broadened him. He was abroad. He is now assisting me in this business."

"I see," said Dick, glancing about and taking note of an empty desk which did not seem to be much used.

"Did you know what the name of the child's father was?" he continued.

"Yes. It was Dugdale. The Powers people said that the child's father was of an excellent English family, and had been discarded for marrying beneath him and, as they thought, for other wrongs. The name is an old English name, and, besides, there were some papers, old letters and such things, found after the death of the father, which would indicate such to be the case."

"Have you those papers?"

"Well, no. Powers was rather strange about them,

I argued that they were the property of the child and should go with it, but Powers seemed to think he ought to keep them, and, as I did not regard it as essential, I did not press the point. A few scraps, memoranda, a partially written letter, came into my hands, and an old seal-ring much worn and battered, which had upon the seal a device, undecipherable however. I must have these things somewhere, but I would have to hunt for them."

Dick was silent. It seemed to him that the heir to the Dugdale millions was found. The story of Pierson seemed to fit in perfectly with all he had previously learned. Moreover it was straightforward and appeared to be truthful. Dick did not appreciate that the story was direct and conclusive only upon points which he was unable to confirm, and vague in all else, except where the facts were undisputed. He did not even see that the only new point was that he, Pierson, had adopted the child.

He asked another question tending, as he thought, toward the confirmation of Pierson's story.

"Do you know where Powers is?"

"He is dead. So is his wife. They moved to Newark after the adoption."

"Did you ever have communication with them afterward?"

"Yes, from time to time."

Up to this time Pierson had manifested no curiosity as to Dick's identity, nor as to his purpose in making his inquiries. Nor did this occur to Dick as strange, if indeed he appreciated it.

"Can I see the young gentleman?" asked Dick.

"Not to-day, for he has gone a short distance out of town, but you can to-morrow, or any subsequent time that you may appoint."

"I do not know that it is essential," remarked Dick, rising. "I presume, Mr. Pierson, you can establish these facts as you have stated them to me?"

"I presume as a matter of proof? Well, I hardly know how to answer you. My own statement would be proof. Mrs. Tomlinson, if found, would be further proof. There may be other proof to be found after thought, but I can think of none just now. What need is there of proof?"

Dick hesitated before replying, and when he did, it was most cautiously.

"I have been commissioned by certain persons to make these inquiries. I have no direct interest in them for I am merely an agent in the matter. If it can be established that Harold Pierson is Edmund Dugdale's son, I imagine he will inherit some property."

"I presumed it was something of the kind," said Pierson indifferently. "Indeed I have always thought that it might occur, if Powers' story of the father's high connections was true. Is the amount considerable?"

"Considerable is a relative term," said Dick evasively, smiling to think that an annual income of a million dollars from invested property, apart from an enormous business, was termed considerable. "What might be very considerable to one of limited means, might be regarded as very little by others having much. However I could not state the exact amount. Do you know a man named Ransom?" he asked abruptly.

"Ransom! Ransom! I do not think I do," replied Pierson, without the quiver of an eyelash.

"It is unimportant," said Dick, as he bade the old man good-by and left the room.

He did not realize that, during the whole conversation, Pierson had not asked his name, nor that he had not volunteered it, indeed that his own name or those in behalf of whom he had been acting had not been mentioned. Nor did he realize that Pierson permitted him to leave without assurances that anything more would be heard from him or those he represented.

As he left the room, the door leading into the rear of the basement was opened, and Ransom and Bob entered. But Pierson motioned to them most energetically to go back, for Dick had stopped upon the pavement in front, as if he were about to return. But he walked off in the direction of Third Avenue.

When Pierson was assured that Dick had really gone he opened the door and called the two men in.

To Ransom, Pierson extended his hand, grinning broadly. Ransom grasped it, a treacherous, triumphant smile overspreading his face. In his dulcet tones, he exclaimed:

"You are slick, Pierson—a very slick article! Nothing could have been better!"

"He swallowed it without a wry face," said Bob jubilantly.

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Pierson. "He got his information without pumping for it. I oozed it out, meandering around gently."

"Now," asked Bob, seating himself astride an office chair, "what is the next thing to be done?"

"Nothing," promptly replied Ransom. "We must wait for their move now. It will come quick enough."

While this was going forward, Dick was making his way downtown. He wondered how Bessie would receive the news. He knew how Mr. Hetlow would take it. He would acquiesce in it, and as disappointed as he might be, assist the young man to the inheritance, being assured the right man had been found, bowing to the inevitable cheerfully, although the prospect of an alliance with the Mountchessington family was dissipated thereby. The effect of his news upon Merrimount, he thought, would be to promptly send that young nobleman home without a wife.

The large question was how would Bessie treat him now, the bearer of the news that she was not the Dugdale heiress. Would she visit him with her displeas-

ure? One thing he would do and that was that he would again offer himself, and if it had no other result, it would show her that she was as dear to him when she was not a great heiress, as when she prospectively was.

All those interested in his day's work and with whom he wanted to consult, being at Dobbs Ferry, he determined to go there without delay.

CHAPTER XV.

CONFLICTING INTERESTS.

AMPLE time was given Dick to review the events of the day, before the return of the coaching party. The more he reflected upon his talk with Orton Pierson, the more convinced he was that young Dugdale had been found. Orton Pierson might be all Mr. Boyd insisted he was, but the fact remained that he had told all he could tell frankly and unreservedly. And this, too, before he knew Dick's purpose in making the inquiries. He might be a schemer and a designing man, but in this instance he had shown no disposition to conceal anything, nor had he manifested curiosity as to the meaning of the inquiries until he had satisfied Dick's desire for knowledge. Then too, Mr. Pierson's statements were truthful, when judged by all Dick had previously learned. When anything he had said could be put to the test of comparison with the statements of other people, they comported with all the essentials.

And yet Dick was not satisfied. There was a sense of disappointment that Dick told himself was unreasonable. Upon what this feeling was based, or wherein the result failed of expectation, he could not tell. Indeed he was unable to tell what that expectation had been. But whatever it had been, he felt that it had not been realized.

The only weak point, he said to himself, was the lack of documentary evidence. That Harold Pierson was young Dugdale seemed to depend entirely upon Mr. Pierson's word. True, Mrs. Tomlinson could

prove the preliminary talks with Mrs. Pierson and the subsequent call of Mrs. Pierson and her husband upon Mrs. Tomlinson in reference to the adoption. The fact that the child of Dugdale had been adopted by someone could be easily established. So far as he could see, the whole matter turned upon the point as to whether Pierson could establish the fact that the child adopted by him was the one confided by Mrs. Tomlinson to the care of Mrs. Powers, for the purpose of being adopted by someone whose name Mrs. Tomlinson had forgotten.

Then it occurred to him that the box Mrs. Jenkins had spoken of might contain the very proof desired, and as well the papers which Pierson said Powers had insisted upon retaining. Following up this thought, he determined to write to Mrs. Jenkins, urging her to make the search of the box and communicate its contents as promptly as she could. He went into the library to write this letter, and while thus engaged, the coaching party returned.

“Dick went out to meet Mr. Stanton at once, to tell him he had reached important results, and to express the opinion that the facts should be presented to Mr. Hetlow without delay. As a consequence, a messenger was at once dispatched to Mr. Hetlow, asking if it would be agreeable to receive Dick on a matter of importance.

While waiting for the return of the messenger Dick went back to the library to complete his letter to Mrs. Jenkins, to which place Mr. Stanton soon followed.

“I hope you will go to Mr. Hetlow with me,” remarked Dick, as he closed and directed the letter. “What I have to tell Mr. Hetlow is important in every aspect. I will reserve my story until then, and I should like to have your judgment upon it.”

Mr. Stanton consented. In the meantime Dick’s grave and preoccupied manner had been observed by both Mrs. Stanton and Wallis.

By the latter, it was taken to mean that a point of more than usual significance had been reached in the search, but though burning with curiosity and greatly desiring to ask if the heir had been found, she put a curb upon herself and refrained from questioning.

Mrs. Stanton, however, took an entirely different view.

"Something extraordinary has happened," she said, in whispered confidence to her niece. "Something dreadful. It must be very bad if they are driven to consult Mr. Hetlow. I have felt that something bad would occur, ever since I saw that woman here yesterday. I cut the cards last night, and the heart woman in a red shawl turned up every time."

"Nonsense, auntie," replied Wallis, with no little vexation. "I do not doubt but that Mr. Mason has found young Dugdale. From his serious manner, I should not wonder if something is wrong about him, now that he is found."

"Young Dugdale!" cried Mrs. Stanton, in supreme contempt, too indignant to say more, as she swept away, leaving Wallis to follow at her leisure.

The messenger returned, asking Dick to come over immediately. Mr. Hetlow awaited his visitors in the library, and as they entered, he exclaimed:

"O Mason! I see by your face you have made the discovery."

"It would appear so," replied Dick gravely.

The three men gathered about the library table and Dick began his tale. He was possessed of one of those rare memories which carry words and incidents with vivid photographic accuracy. He related his experiences of the day clearly and minutely, omitting nothing, however trivial. When he had finished, Mr. Hetlow who, by the expression of his face, rather than by any comments made, had shown his disappointment, said:

"You express no opinion, Mason. What do you think of it?"

"I am forced to the conclusion, sir, that young Dugdale has been found," replied Dick firmly.

"I do not know that it is at all singular that a child born twenty-seven years ago should be found alive to-day," remarked Mr. Hetlow thoughtfully, as if in answer to a question he had asked himself.

"I suppose, from the manner of your statement," said Mr. Stanton, "you have attempted to give us a literal description of your interview with Pierson, and in the same order as it took place?"

"Yes," replied Dick, "so far as my memory has permitted me, I have given you an exact statement of the interview."

"Then it would appear, before you had declared the purpose of your question, he had given you a statement of all the facts of which he was possessed, leading to the conclusion that Harold Pierson was young Dugdale?" pursued the lawyer.

"Yes."

"It appears to be conclusive," returned the lawyer. "The fact I note would seem to make it so. Yet, does it not seem singular to you—this readiness of Pierson to yield up the information without a single question, and as well, his remarkable lack of curiosity as to your motives in the inquiry?"

"Isn't that to be explained by his remark at the close of the interview, that he had always expected that something in the way of a legacy would turn up some time for the child he had adopted?"

"Perhaps!" answered Mr. Stanton doubtfully. "Did you give him your name? I don't recollect that you did in your statement?"

Dick turned to the lawyer in a start of surprise. The fact flashed upon him that he had given Pierson neither his name nor that of the person whom he represented. He told Mr. Stanton so.

"It is certainly very remarkable," continued the lawyer. "It argues marvelous possession of self-

control, or extraordinary indifference. However, that is not to say that his story may not be true."

"I'll confess to a feeling of disappointment, and to a wish that the search had turned out differently," said Mr. Hetlow. "However, I presume we have nothing else to do but to retire and let him take the property."

"When he has proved his identity, and not until then," interposed Mr. Stanton energetically. "A great deal must be done before he can become possessed of the property. I admit that at present everything indicates that the young man has been found. But it all wants confirmation and corroboration."

"Let me state the situation as it seems to me," he continued, hitching his chair closer to the table and placing his elbow upon it. "Samuel Dugdale dies intestate. The next of kin is a son of Edmund Dugdale—a grandson—of whose existence, or, if alive, of whose whereabouts, there is no knowledge sufficient to form a belief. Failing his appearance, your daughter is next of kin. In the absence of any knowledge whatever, you would have been justified, both in law and morals, in preferring the claims of your daughter and in seizing the property, and maintaining possession, until dispossessed by strong proof, were the nearest claimant to appear. But you did not do so. You set on foot an energetic effort to determine whether the next of kin was alive or dead, and, if alive, to inform him of the estate awaiting him. In this I think you were right, both from a high moral ground and from the lower one of expediency. Now, as a result of that effort, you have found one who, upon a first consideration of the matter, seems to be the man. You have done your whole duty. No compulsion rested upon you to do what you have done. It was merely an obligation of honor. You have nothing more to do in this direction than to tell the young man that, if he really is the son of Edmund

Dugdale deceased, and the grandson of Samuel Dugdale deceased, the Dugdale estate becomes his.

"Now, having done this, your attitude toward the young man should change," continued the lawyer. "You have a duty to perform to your daughter. You must insist, both in the interest of your daughter and of justice, that the identity of the young man should be so well established, and the proof of his claim to the estate made so strong, that it is beyond question that the estate is really going into the hands of a grandson of Samuel Dugdale. You must demand proof. And it is no part of your duty to assist him to proof. You have done your whole duty, when you have hunted him up and asked him for proof."

"It seems to me, sir," said Dick deferentially, "that any other course than that pointed out by Mr. Stanton would be unjust to Miss Hetlow. And now, when I say without reservation that there seems to be no escape from the conclusion that young Dugdale has been found, I may say that an impression, for which strive as I may I can find no reason, was made upon me that there is—I cannot say wrong, for that would be too strong—well, that all was not satisfactory. I think there should be a rigid investigation before yielding to the irrevocable conclusion that Harold Pierson is young Dugdale."

"What course would you suggest?" inquired Mr. Hetlow of Mr. Stanton.

"The first thing I should do would be to communicate the facts Mason has presented, to your family solicitor in London, with the request that he should either himself come to this country, or send someone qualified to act, in protection of the estate, and examine the proof presented in behalf of Harold Pierson, as we must call him until he has proved himself to be Dugdale," said Mr. Stanton. "I should think it would be a good thing for you to ask young Pierson

to come here, and you could then tell him what is before him. Then we could all have a chance to see and question him."

Mr. Hetlow was thoughtful for some time over this suggestion. Finally he said to Dick:

"I presume you could communicate by letter with him, Mason?"

"Oh, yes," replied Dick, "or, if not with him, with the old man Pierson."

Mr. Stanton, who had misunderstood the drift of Mr. Hetlow's question, interposed:

"The more I think upon my suggestion, the more I am convinced that it would be the better plan. I am moved to this also, by a curious feeling that it would be far better to have our first interview with the young man at a place where Orton Pierson could not be present. This arises, of course, from the distrust I have of that man."

"I agree with you," acquiesced Mr. Hetlow, reaching forward and touching a bell. "So, Mason, write to this young Pierson and ask him to spend Friday night with me."

A servant entered in response to the bell, and after Mr. Hetlow had instructed him to ask Miss Hetlow to come into the library, he continued:

"Of course, Mason, you will say enough to him in your letter to indicate why he is wanted here, and will also let him know what relations I bear to the Dugdale family."

Dick had barely time to reply that he comprehended his instructions, when Bessie entered. Dick rose hastily and offered her a chair.

"Bessie, my child," began her father, somewhat impressively, "I fear you will be compelled to steel yourself against a great disappointment."

"Oh," laughed Bessie lightly, "the Dugdale is found!"

—

As she said this she turned her eyes upon Dick and dropped them quickly, a slight blush mantling her cheeks.

"It would seem from all we have heard to-day that he has been found," returned her father.

"I thought this solemn conclave argued as much," returned Bessie. "I wagered a pair of gloves with Lord Merrimount this morning that Mr. Mason"—she faltered a brief instant over the name—"would find the young man. I've won. Well, it is proper. Alive, the estate belonged to him. And for myself, I feel a great relief that I am not to be burdened by so much gold. Of course I know that I ought to rave, and tear my hair, and gnash my teeth in rage and disappointment in order to justify the belief of some people that, with the prospect of so great a fortune, of necessity I must have become sordid and avaricious, but I can't. The relief is too great."

She could not deny herself this little feminine stab at Dick, who did not fail to appreciate it, though her father was aghast at the high spirits she manifested over the loss of a fortune, and the sincerity, clearly evident, of her self-congratulation over the escape from it. With the assumption of increased dignity, he replied:

"You go very fast, my daughter. The matter is not determined. While I think the chances are largely that young Dugdale has been discovered, the fact is not established." Then he added with some sarcasm: "You may yet be burdened with the wealth. I would not rejoice too soon. I felt it my duty, however, to inform you as to the condition of affairs, immediately that I was made aware of it."

Feeling that she was rebuked, Bessie did not reply, and Dick, to prevent embarrassment, made a movement toward the door, saying as he did so that he would go to write the letter Mr. Hetlow desired him to send to young Pierson.

Mr. Stanton rose at the same moment and the two left the room, returning to Spring Hill.

Mr. Hetlow, thus left with his daughter, related to her at length and in detail the results of Dick's visit to New York during the day. When he had finished Bessie replied:

"I don't doubt that I was frivolous in my reply to you when you told me first, but yet my words represented my feelings. I do not regret the fact that young Dugdale is found. To have come into possession of this great wealth would have been to take upon myself a life and a career for which I am fitted neither by training nor inclination. This may seem to you like the confession of a lack of proper spirit but it is the way I feel. I am content as things are."

"And there was no attraction in a brilliant social prospect?" asked her father, rather proud of her than otherwise.

"None. That was the heaviest burden, it seemed to me."

"Nor in the possibility of high rank and a distinguished social position, by means of a marriage which such wealth would justify you in expecting?"

"Nor that either. It may show little ambition. But I am, you know, an American girl, and I am patriotic enough to be satisfied with an American husband—" and she added gently, "of my own choosing."

Her father smiled, and impressing a kiss upon her forehead, led her toward the door.

"After all," he said, "I am better pleased to have you in this frame of mind than one of deep disappointment. I presume the person who will be the most grieved will be Lord Merrimount."

Bessie bent her eyes keenly upon her father, thinking he was about to reveal the exact nature of the young nobleman's proposition, and she determined to let her father know then, that whatever it was, touching her,

she would not have accepted it. But he said no more.

"I presume it was Mr. Mason who made this discovery," she asked, finding her father did not speak.

"Yes; he acted with great skill and caution."

"Is he convinced that the young man is the one?"

"Yes, convinced, but not satisfied. It seems contradictory does it not? But he explained himself fully. He is, however, very urgent that the investigation should be of the most rigid character."

By this time they had reached the door leading into the corridor, and Mr. Hetlow added:

"I must find Merrimount. He should know of this."

At the moment Merrimount turned into the corridor, and Bessie slipped away, that she might not be present when her father told the young nobleman.

Mr. Hetlow, taking Merrimount into the library, closed the door, saying as he did so:

"I am afraid, my lord, that you will be greatly disappointed over the news I have to communicate."

Merrimount looked up at him quickly and said:

"You would tell me that young Dugdale has been found?"

"Yes."

"I was prepared for it. I thought so when I heard that Mason had returned so quickly. Of course I regret it. I suppose the discovery turns my mission to America into failure."

"Not necessarily," replied Mr. Hetlow. "First let me say that as yet it is only strongly indicative. The identity of the young man must first be proved. It may yet turn out to be a mistake. But even if it is found to be true, I do not see that thereby your mission need necessarily be a failure. It may be, and quite possibly is, that the young man will be as willing to entertain the proposition as I would have been, had the reverse been the case. Indeed, I am inclined to

believe that he will. I can see a great many reasons why he should. You may rest assured that if he will accept advice from me, advice will be given him to accept your proposition."

"You gratify me greatly," said the young Englishman, his face lighting up. "It is somewhat selfish in me, to be so well pleased at a time when you must be naturally disappointed."

"Oh, not at all," interrupted Mr. Hetlow. "I will not attempt to conceal that I saw many advantages to arise from this inheritance if it were to come into my family. However, pardon the boast, poverty does not be any means result from the discovery of the heir in the direct line. As for my daughter, she is decidedly pleased with the result. She says the wealth would have given her a life for which she was not trained."

"Miss Hetlow will grace any rank of life," said the young man sincerely.

"Thank you," said Mr. Hetlow proudly. "Miss Hetlow is modest in her estimate of her own powers, but it is not a modesty which arises from bashfulness. However, what I want to suggest is that you still remain a guest at 'The Larches' until this matter is finally determined, and I think I can pledge the assistance of Mr. Stanton and Mr. Mason, as well as myself, in furthering your interests in any negotiations you may have with the heir of Samuel Dugdale, whoever he may turn out to be."

"I am very grateful. I have been on the point several times of asking permission to make a confidant of Mr. Mason on this subject. I like him very much and have come to have great faith in his practical knowledge of affairs."

"He deserves your faith and confidence," promptly replied Mr. Hetlow, "but I would prefer that this business should be finished before you make your revelation. This young Pierson is to visit me on Friday and stay the night."

"Of course it shall be as you wish," said Merrimount. "I do not know that any interest will be served by my seeing Pierson. And perhaps it would be as well that I should not be in the way while he is here. So I will submit what I have been proposing some days to do. I do not want to return to England until I have visited Niagara, and after that I'll go for a day or two to Montreal and to Ottawa, where there is a fellow stationed who was in the Guards with me—a great chum. Then I'll return here with your leave."

Thus it was that Merrimount left "The Larches" the next day.

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK'S PROGRESS.

DINNER and Wallis awaited the return of Mr. Stanton and Dick, the latter with impatience. At the table Dick's story was told again, and Wallis' curiosity was satisfied. Mrs. Stanton however was not. She believed that the story of finding young Dugdale was only a part of the scheme to shield her husband and deceive her. Therefore, she broke into the conversation with irrelevant remarks indicative of her wonder over the gullibility of people who could be induced to accept any statement, however absurd, as the truth.

It was Mr. Stanton's habit to be patient with all of Mrs. Stanton's peculiarities, attributing them to the general irrelevancy and want of logic of the feminine mind, against which there was little use in contending. But on this occasion, her remarks were so frequent, and seemed to be so inspired by purpose, that becoming irritated, he exclaimed :

“ What are you driving at ? ”

“ Oh, nothing,” replied Mrs. Stanton, with a provoking assumption of indifference. “ Oh, nothing at all, my dear.”

“ Then don't interrupt the conversation with remarks so foreign to the topics we are discussing,” sharply commanded her husband.

“ Oh, no doubt you would like to shape the conversation so as to avoid certain disagreeable topics,” was her answer. “ You may delude Wallis, but not me.”

“ Now, for Heaven's sake,” cried Mr. Stanton, putting aside his knife and fork and looking steadily at

his wife, "please tell me what relevancy that has to anything said here."

"Have you found that baby you and Mr. Mason were planning to hunt for, on the veranda a few days ago?" she asked, with an expression of blended cunning and triumph.

The old lawyer looked with helpless wonder from Wallis to Dick, both of whom were striving hard to maintain their gravity.

"Mrs. Stanton is alluding to our conversation of a few days ago, when we talked of the best means to be employed in the search for the Dugdale child," interposed Dick, when he could control his voice and face.

"Oh?" ejaculated the lawyer, resuming his meal, "Yes, that baby has been found, I imagine. He will be at Mr. Hetlow's house next Friday."

It was now Mrs. Stanton's turn to be astonished.

"What!" she cried. "Mr. Hetlow will do that! He is willing to receive that child into his own house, his daughter living there too! I would not have believed it of him."

"What are you talking of now?" demanded Mr. Stanton, thoroughly mystified.

Wallis and Dick, unable to control themselves longer, burst into loud laughter.

"Oh, it is very amusing, I have no doubt," exclaimed the indignant lady sarcastically. "Though I question the wisdom of his act, I cannot but admire the friendship Mr. Hetlow displays toward Mr. Stanton. It is an extraordinary thing to do, merely to shield him."

"Shield whom?" cried Mr. Stanton, now thoroughly exasperated. "What nonsense is this? Have you taken leave of your senses? I have nothing to do with it. It is his own act."

"Which makes it all the more generous," replied the good lady complacently. "Who is to bring the baby to him?"

"Well," answered the old lawyer, with a grin. "I

take it that a baby, twenty-six or seven years old, is able to bring himself."

"Twenty-six or seven years old," repeated Mrs. Stanton in deep disgust. "At least you might do me the poor justice of treating me as a rational being. A baby twenty-six or seven years old!"

"However rational you may be, you are certainly not talking rationally," retorted Mr. Stanton. "What I say is true. On Friday night Harold Pierson, who is supposed to be young Dugdale, the heir to the Dugdale estates, and who was found by Mason this morning, will visit Mr. Hetlow, to learn from Mr. Hetlow's lips the prospect before him."

This was said with such angry emphasis that Mrs. Stanton realized she had gone as far with her husband as she dared, and so she quietly remarked with an air of resignation :

"I suppose it is my duty as a wife to believe this."

The explosion of laughter from Wallis and Dick, following this wifely submission, ended the meal.

Later in the evening Wallis and Dick wandered over to "The Larches," and found the family on the lawn overlooking the river. Mr. Hetlow welcomed them warmly, for it was evident he wanted to talk with Dick upon Harold Pierson and his surroundings.

"I am conscious of great disappointment," said Mr. Hetlow, after Dick had exhausted his stock of knowledge, thought, and suggestion upon the subject. "I did not know, until after your discovery, what strong hopes I had entertained that nothing would come of the search I myself instituted. I suppose there is a point of morals in this. I presume it was wrong of me to entertain such hopes, and wrong of me to feel disappointment. I must have hoped for two things—one that young Dugdale was dead, or, that, if alive, he could not be found. It really amounts to coveting for Bessie, my neighbor's goods."

"Did you covet the estate for Miss Hetlow, before

you knew she would be the heiress if young Dugdale were not found?" asked Merrimount.

"No; I never thought of it," replied Mr. Hetlow. "I thought Samuel Dugdale had made a will."

"I imagine your disappointment," continued the young nobleman, "is due more to defeated anticipations, than to a defeated desire to secure the property, especially if it was to be possessed by keeping the real heir in ignorance of his rights. I have not expressed myself well. The distinction I try to draw is subtle. I appreciate it, without being able to formulate it."

"The disappointment is natural," put in Dick. "Nor is it to be condemned upon moral grounds. It is not because the property is lost to Miss Hetlow by its going into rightful hands, but that the conditions have destroyed an anticipation. This brings you back to the conditions. And these conditions are that the natural heir is alive and known, instead of being dead or lost to view. Your anticipations were born at a time when there was every possible indication that that heir had disappeared either by death or lost identity. You were not responsible for that condition by any act, nor would you have been, had the search determined such to be the facts. You are responsible for the present conditions, because you have brought them about by your own honorable act. You, yourself, destroyed your anticipations. To feel disappointed over the conditions for which you were not responsible, but which were apparently true, is not to have hoped from the beginning that they were true. I rather think you accepted them as true, and took precautions to determine they were, before you might do possible wrong."

"That is what I mean," replied Merrimount, "there is a nice distinction there. Had Mr. Hetlow seized the property for Miss Hetlow, without effort to discover whether or not she was the rightful heir, but had, upon the appearance of the grandson, made an

effort to resist his claim despite the proof, he might have been blamed. But to feel a disappointment over a defeated anticipation and charge it as immoral, or ignoble, is rather finely drawn. I don't think myself the millennium is here."

"No," said Dick laughing, "and so long as it isn't here, the proper man of the time cries out 'oh hang the luck,' proceeds to no wrong-doing, but submits to the inevitable."

"But Mr. Hetlow has been more than passively right," urged Merrimount. "He has put forth all power to find the young man, and finding him, proposes to call him up and say 'There's the property, prove your claim.'

"But, Bessie," laughed Mr. Hetlow, highly pleased over the discussion between the two young men, "while these young moral philosophers are determining exactly my moral *status*, you are dispossessed of your property and career."

"Dispossessed of something she had never had or desired," replied Bessie, soberly lifting her shy eyes to Dick.

"Well, daughter," said Mr. Hetlow, rising from his seat, "if Harold Pierson is young Dugdale, he is my grand-nephew and your second cousin, and must be received accordingly. In the meantime I submit that it is not conducive to health to sit here longer."

"Oh, don't let us be shut up so soon," cried Wallis. "Let us go for a stroll," and then, with that audacity which always took away Mr. Hetlow's breath and afforded Merrimount much quiet amusement, she said to the young nobleman, "Rise up, Mr. Lazybones, and give me your arm, and we'll wander off under the moon, like those rustic swains, with which your writing people are always peopling your 'quiet English lanes.'"

The young Englishman quickly rose and, with as courtly a bow as he might have given his queen, professed his arm and said :

"I obey your commands, Miss Gladwin. I am always willing to be your swain, but for how long shall it be?"

"Poh!" exclaimed the downright Wallis. "Compliments! They are always insincere. I don't want them. But I do want answers to some of my questions. You told uncle this morning, for I heard you, that I was an amusing baggage; and ever since I have been dying to know whether I was a trunk or a valise. Which is it?"

Bessie and Dick, who were greatly embarrassed when they realized how cleverly Wallis had maneuvered to throw them together, were relieved by their laughter and Merrimount's astonishment at her question.

"A trunk or a valise?" he asked. "Upon my soul I don't know. If I were to regard you as a trunk it would be because of the undiscovered possibilities that might lurk within its recesses when searched; if a valise, because it usually contains so many things indispensable to the comfort of the wayfarer."

"Oh, dear!" cried Wallis. "Come along, Bessie and Mr. Mason. I've fished for and obtained a thoroughly unique compliment."

"But," inquired Merrimount innocently, "what has a trunk or a valise to do with my calling you a baggage?"

"Aren't trunks and valises baggage?"

"We call them luggage at home."

"To be sure," laughed Wallis. "So I threw in my hook and brought up a compliment rather than a joke."

She hurried Merrimount away so that Dick and Bessie could follow leisurely. This they did, not without a good deal of constraint and awkwardness. They walked side by side for some distance in silence. It was Dick who spoke first.

"When I parted from you the last time we talked together alone, I said I would ask you again for an

explanation of the offense I had given you. I do now ask you."

"I think you then wanted an explanation of what you were pleased to term my singular conduct," returned Bessie.

"For Heaven's sake!" exclaimed Dick earnestly, "do not let us again drift into misapprehension. I have given you offense evidently. I am not conscious of how or where. I ask you to tell wherein my offense lies that I may make reparation."

Bessie did not reply. Indeed she did not know what reply to make. The situation was embarrassing. That of which he had been guilty in her eyes was the undertaking of the search for young Dugdale. And that only because it argued an indifference to her. If she were to give this as the offense, it would be showing him that the sentiment with which he regarded her was of great moment to her, and she was not yet ready to confess that.

Dick waited patiently for her to reply, but as she did not, he spoke :

"You are silent. Am I to understand you decline, and I must remain in ignorance."

Fairly driven by desperation, Bessie harked back to the old cry.

"Did you not say I was sordid and avaricious? Is that not enough to give offense?"

"No, I did not," said Dick flatly. "That was a construction I never intended, but put upon my words by you. I have told you I never thought so, and do not now. But since you insist upon the construction, I here, now, make the most humble apology."

"I do not want you to apologize for what you think you never did," said Bessie softly.

Dick pressed his advantage.

"Then you accept unreservedly my statement that I did not mean such things?"

"Yes, if you wish it?"

"But it is not to be as I wish it. It must be, if at all, as you believe."

"I do so believe it."

"I am grateful," said Dick, so simply and so sincerely as to touch a responsive chord in Bessie. "But since you had apparently taken offense before those words were uttered, I am justified in believing that only a part of the offense was then given."

He was torturing her with his persistency. He was so determined she could see no way of escape. If his attitude was persistent and determined, he was yet respectful and tender. He compelled her admiration by his strong self-control.

"Why will you be so persistent?" she cried out. "Why will you not see that I don't want to be driven to confess my own weakness and silliness?"

"Nothing you can say or do can be weak or silly in my eyes," he urged.

"Well then, if you will," replied Bessie, abandoning further struggle, "I was offended because you were willing to undertake that search for young Dugdale."

"But you did not want the property?" he said. "I never believed you wanted it, if it were not yours to take. You have shown since the search terminated that you were glad it was not to fall to you."

"Neither did I. But—but you had—you had pretended to be—friendly to me, and it looked as if you didn't care whether—good or ill came to me."

Wallis was right after all! Her interpretation was the true one. Dick trembled with joy. In these few words was the confession he so much wanted to hear.

"Whether good or ill came to you?" he repeated, his voice tremulous with suppressed passion. "Oh! in my deep love for you, was the incentive for the undertaking. I will confess a wrong. Not the one you thought. I feared this inheritance would carry you beyond my reach, and I did not want it to fall to you. I love you so deeply that I could seek to prevent those

riches from coming to you. But say that you forgive me. Say it now when you know that it was not because of indifference to you."

Merrimount and Wallis were some distance in front of them. Their outlines could be faintly seen against the shrubbery, which darkened the way and threw them into the shadow. Bessie made no reply, but Dick thought, from the tremulous pressure of her hand upon his arm, that she was not displeased. He took her hand in his own. She did not repulse him.

At this moment Wallis uttered a shriek of alarm. Dick saw the forms of two men struggling in the dark. He ran forward, Bessie following closely. As he came up, the man struggling with the young Englishman, fell backward a step or two, uttering an oath, and dashed into the shrubbery. A moment later the form of another man was seen issuing from the shrubbery on the other side. He cleared the open space at a bound and followed the other.

As he did so Merrimount gave expression to an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" asked Dick.

"I don't understand," said Merrimount. "I stumbled over a fellow lying upon the ground, and he jumped up and made at me. But the other one—if it were not impossible, I could have sworn he was a fellow I once knew intimately, but who went wrong."

"And I could almost swear that the one who attacked you was the one who put me on the track of young Dugdale," said Dick.

"Well," said Wallis, "it has been an adventure, but rather an alarming one."

"Too much so," added Bessie. "Let us go back."

They returned to the house. The reconciliation between Dick and Bessie was complete. But for the interruption it would have gone on to something more. Perhaps both were disappointed, but Dick was happy and so was Bessie.

Wallis was not long in discovering the situation.

She whispered to Merrimount :

“I am a great *diplomat*.”

Merrimount looked down upon her admiringly and replied :

“I have no doubt you are everything you say you are, but I don’t understand.”

“And I don’t mean you shall,” saucily said Wallis.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BOX AND ITS CONTENTS.

LORD MERRIMOUNT left "The Larches" the following morning on his trip to Canada, by the way of Niagara. He had vainly endeavored to persuade Dick, for whom it was quite apparent he had formed a liking, to accompany him. But Dick had represented that just at that juncture of affairs Mr. Hetlow would have need of his services, and so the young Englishman went away alone.

He was greatly missed from the Hetlow household. Simple in his manners, unostentatious in his bearing, presuming not at all upon his rank, indeed endeavoring to put aside his title as much as possible, and entering with spirit into the life about him, he had made himself a favorite with all. It was not until after he was gone, that it was realized how easily he had slipped into their home life. It is true Bessie had never forgotten that there existed in him a possible suitor for her hand. In any event, under all the circumstances, she would have maintained a somewhat distant relation to him, for she had firmly resolved that if he should ever come to her as a suitor, she would deny him. But she was further influenced by what she considered to be unpardonable and cold-hearted calculation, in that he should coolly and calmly wait to know whether or not she was the Dugdale heiress before he ventured on the step. She had therefore never permitted herself to drift into anything like intimacy with the young nobleman, but had borne herself with a reserve toward him not natural to her. It was true that she had not been able to

reconcile this cool calculation with his simple manly nature, nor could she refrain from admitting that, in every other way, he was admirable. She had finally settled it by attributing his theory of the marital relation as one simply of *convenience* to the training of the world in which he moved.

Wallis, however, had formally accepted him as a good fellow and had been one with him. She had therefore gotten on famously with him. Her utter want of deference to his rank, her frankness, startling Bessie often, and her audacity of address, without more respect than she accorded other young gentlemen of her acquaintance, amused and interested him, though at first, having been accustomed all his life to the greatest consideration, it made him wonder.

On the same morning Dick had accompanied Mr. Hetlow and Mr. Stanton to the city, so the girls were left alone to spend the day together.

They had gone for a stroll in the morning, and by easy degrees reached that nook in the rocks on the river shore where Dick had so unexpectedly declared to Bessie his love for her.

Bessie was in gay spirits—gayer than she had been for many days—lighter-hearted and more prone to laughter.

As they were sitting together watching the river with its ever changing face, Wallis abruptly said :

“Bessie, you are happier than you have been for many days.”

The other looked up quickly, her face beaming, laughing to conceal her emotions, for she knew only too well to what her happiness was to be attributed.

“I presume,” she said, “that it is the relief I feel from the weighty burden of riches and the awfully narrow escape I have had from becoming Lady Merrimount.”

“Oh, that isn’t it,” said Wallis, rising from her seat and perching herself upon a large rock, from which

she could look down on her companion, reclining in an angle of two other rocks. "No, indeed. I know better than that."

Bessie blushed and laughed again.

"Perhaps you will tell me what it is then. For if it is not that I don't know."

"The fib is not becoming. No, no. It's Mr. Mason—Dick."

"Mr. Mason!"

Supreme contempt and heightened color upon the part of Bessie.

"The blushes are!" commented the tormentor on the rock. "Yes, Mr. Mason. The quarrel, in which you were so perverse and Dick so stupid, has been settled."

"You can call Mr. Mason anything but stupid," Bessie replied, very quick in defense. "Father says he is one of the very brightest men he ever knew."

"Oh! Does the father also say that he would like that same 'one of the brightest men' for a son-in-law?"

"You are absurd."

"Of course Mr. Mason desires to personate that character?"

"How should I know? He has never informed me as to his desires."

"Oh! You do have a perverse streak, Bessie. Do you mean to stand there and deliberately tell me that Mr. Mason has not told you what all the rest of us know—that he loves you?"

"Wallis, I am not standing, so I could not deliberately tell you anything that way. But I will not equivocate. Mr. Mason did on one occasion intimate something of the kind, but—" and she hesitated long enough to recall, with a happy smile playing about her lips, the picture of Dick standing in that very place, with earnest face and in tones almost fierce, telling her of his unconquerable love for herself, and then went on—"but he has never asked me to be his wife."

"You're trifling with me," said Wallis severely. "Well, I know Dick Mason has told you that he loves you deeply and desperately, and when a man does that the other follows as a matter of course. If this Harold Pierson turns out to be young Dugdale, I suppose things will go more smoothly. Your father would never have consented if all that money had been coming to you."

"Why not?"

"Because he would have had higher ambitions for you."

"If all that money were mine, I would have been in a position to have chosen my own husband without anybody's consent. So you know it would have been better the other way."

Bessie did not appreciate that in this remark she had in fact admitted all Wallis had been endeavoring to elicit.

"But the difficulty would have been that Mr. Mason would not have been a suitor then," argued Wallis.

"Do you think so?" asked Bessie, much troubled.

"He would have thought you had gone beyond his reach."

"Well then, perhaps it is better as it is," said Bessie softly. The two were silent for some moments, when Bessie said :

"Lord Merrimount will not be away long."

"I'm glad. He's very nice."

"That is what he says of you."

"Present my thanks to Lord Merrimount and tell him I prefer his other opinion of me—that I am an amusing baggage."

"Do you resent that?"

"Not at all. I am overpowered with the knowledge that so high and mighty a personage could have any opinion at all of me."

"Wallis, everybody jumped to the conclusion that Lord Merrimount wanted to marry me."

"Yes ; if you were the Dugdale heiress."

"I don't believe it."

"Mr. Mason overheard him make the proposition for your hand and came to me downright sick over it."

Blushes were on Bessie's cheeks again.

"Well, I don't care if he did," said Bessie. "I've an idea of my own."

"Really ! And it is ?"

"That Lord Merrimount is fond of you."

Wallis sat upright regarding Bessie with severity.

"Bessie !"

"I do indeed. When you are near, he rarely has eyes for anyone else. And I have noticed that when you are talking, he can't hear what anyone else is saying. I am quite sure that before long I shall be addressing you as my Lady Merrimount."

"That will be nice," replied Wallis, preparing to climb down from the rock. "In the meantime, as the most palpable effect of the reconciliation between yourself and Dick Mason has been to leave you bereft of the little sense you once had, let us go back out of the sun. I think your head is slightly affected."

"But I am in earnest," persisted Bessie, rising and picking up her sun umbrella.

"So am I," acquiesced Wallis. "But I am not prevented from seeing that you have taken a very ingenious method to put an end to conversation about Mr. Mason."

"But wouldn't it be jolly if you were to marry Lord Merrimount and I——"

"Were to marry Dick Mason," said Wallis, completing the sentence for the other. "Bah ! He's poor."

"But think of the rank he'd give you."

"Rank ! Can you tell me of anything worse than genteel poverty ?"

"Yes—poverty that is not genteel."

"Nonsense. You can marry poverty, because

you're rich. I must marry riches because I'm poor."

"You're a mercenary little wretch."

They walked away together. Notwithstanding Wallis had successfully shown her contempt over Bessie's proposition, she was not a little flurried over the suggestion.

"Pshaw!" she said aloud to herself, after she had parted with her friend, where their paths separated. "Pshaw! why couldn't Bessie keep her thoughts to herself. All the fun will be over with Lord Merrimount and, in spite of the nonsense of the idea, I'll be playing Miss Propriety to him, when he comes back."

Dick returned in the evening with Mr. Stanton, and was handed a letter which had been received during his absence, and bearing the Philadelphia postmark.

It was from Mrs. Jenkins. Evidently correspondence was not one of her accomplishments. From her eccentric penmanship and obscure sentences, however, he extracted the fact that the tin box, of which she had spoken when he had seen her, had been found. Moreover, when examined, it had yielded some letters and papers bearing upon the adoption of the Dugdale child. Of what importance these letters and papers might be, however, she was unable to tell. There was one letter, she said, which her husband thought might be from the man who had adopted the child. The name however Dick could not decipher, for it had been written over and blurred, so as to become utterly indistinguishable. The letter closed with the statement that Mrs. Jenkins and her husband were called the following week to New York, and if Mr. Mason thought the box and its contents of sufficient importance, they would bring it with them and deliver it to him.

Since the discovery of the supposed Dugdale heir, and Dick's visit to Orton Pierson, interest in what

Mrs. Jenkins might discover had been lessened. This letter to some extent revived the interest, but Dick did not think that the box would do more than help to confirm Harold Pierson's claim to the estate. He remembered that when he talked with Orton Pierson, the old man had said that there were some papers found among the effects of Edmund Dugdale, which James Powers had insisted upon retaining, although Orton Pierson had argued with him that they were the property of the child and should go with it. He now thought the papers spoken of by Mrs. Jenkins were those alluded to by Orton Pierson, and he assumed that the letter referred to was one possibly written by either Mr. or Mrs. Pierson.

He showed the letter to Mr. Stanton, who did not regard it so indifferently as Dick had done.

"This may be very important," he said; "important in more ways than one, even if it does what you think it does—confirm the title of Harold Pierson to the estate."

"We might assume the position," said Dick laughing, "that the burden of finding proof of his identity should rest upon him and not upon us."

"Nevertheless," replied Mr. Stanton, "even if neighbor Hetlow is not to have this property, there will be a decided satisfaction in being assured that it has gone into the hands of the proper person—that the proof was unmistakable. You will do well to ask her to deliver the box to you."

Thereupon Dick sat down and wrote Mrs. Jenkins, asking that she bring the box with her and deliver it to him in person, and promising to reward her for her trouble.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DUGDALE HEIR.

THE intervening days were not marked by incidents of moment. Though Dick had remained at Springhill, no opportunity to renew his conversation with Bessie had presented itself. They had met more than once, but never alone or under such circumstances as permitted him to press forward to the end he so much desired to reach. The relations existing prior to the rupture had been resumed, perhaps with a little restraint upon Dick's part and shyness upon that of Bessie. But he was in a far better frame of mind. If he was eager for a definite understanding, and chafed under the delay and suspense, he was yet hopeful as to a result which would be all that he could desire. So that he was comparatively happy.

It had been arranged that the Springhill people were to dine with Mr. Hetlow on Friday, when Bob, or Harold Pierson, as he must be known when at "The Larches," would be present. After the dinner it was proposed that Mr. Hetlow, in the presence of Mr. Stanton and Dick, should communicate to Harold Pierson the fact that he was supposed to be the Dugdale heir.

Friday afternoon arrived and with it Harold Pierson. His arrival at "The Larches" was soon made known at Springhill, and Wallis entertained the Stanton family with whimsical speculations as to what he would be like.

Mrs. Stanton had steadfastly believed and insisted that the story of the discovery of the heir, and of his coming to visit Mr. Hetlow, was a mere device to mis-

lead her as to the movements of the three gentlemen, engaged in an intrigue to shield her husband. When, however, the hour drew near and no excuses for the non-appearance of Harold Pierson were made, but on the contrary the announcement that he had arrived, she was much perplexed. Finally, she found a way out of her perplexity by the ingenious imagining that a young man had been employed to personate the Dugdale heir for the time. This reasonable conclusion she communicated to Wallis, who, in her vexation, said :

“ If you are driven to imagine things, auntie, I should think it would be far more reasonable to suppose that Harold Pierson was really the Dugdale heir, but in consideration of the great benefit Mr. Hetlow is about to confer upon him, they will insist that he must help them by personating the baby you are so much troubled about. Such theory, at all events, would have the advantage of plausibility.”

“ That is the most sensible thing I have ever known you to say,” cried the delighted lady. “ Undoubtedly that is the very thing they have done. I have not given you credit for such sense and shrewdness. Yes, that is it. I am really obliged to you for thinking of it.”

“ But I don’t think it,” protested Wallis. “ I merely suggest it as the least foolish of all the imaginings you may engage upon.”

But it was now a settled conviction with the good lady, and she went away to prepare for the dinner quite light-hearted over so great a discovery, as she called it.

When the people from Springhill were ushered into the drawing-room, the young man, to discover whom Dick had spent so many anxious hours, was found seated with Mr. Hetlow. Bessie had not yet come from her room.

The young man was presented under his name of

Harold Pierson. What they saw was a young man of athletic figure and strong face, which might have been pronounced handsome, were it not for a certain hardness of outline which suggested faintly a latent spirit of cruelty. He was unquestionably easy in his surroundings, well mannered, well bred, and quite evidently accustomed to the forms of polite society.

As Dick was presented as Mr. Mason, he looked upon him with polite interest, asking :

“Am I mistaken in supposing you are the Mr. Mason who called upon my father, a few days ago?”

Assured that he was not, he added :

“Your call was the cause of much speculation upon the part of Mr. Pierson.”

Turning easily to Mr. Stanton he inquired if he was one of the favored ones permitted to reside in the locality, the beauty of which had been revealed to him that day through the courtesy of Mr. Hetlow.

The whole manner of the man indicated one accustomed to the ways of the refined world. This surprised Dick, for he could not reconcile this easy and graceful man of the world with the home he had been reared in. Bessie now swept into the room and the presentation followed, closely watched by Dick, who again saw the man of the world, versed in its phrases, showing society's deference to the sex.

Dinner was announced and an incident occurred, small in itself, but which impressed and still further perplexed Dick. As Mr. Hetlow rose, the young guest, without a moment's hesitation, but with prompt recognition of his own standing in the house, offered his arm to Bessie, proceeding with her to the dining-room.

Dick muttered to himself, as he followed into the dining-room, these were not the manners of 128th Street or of Orton Pierson's home.

If the young guest did not particularly shine in the light bright talk of the dinner table, he certainly bore himself without reproach. And here Dick had full

opportunity to study the face of the supposed heir, He was not favorably impressed with the man when under bright lights. Traces of dissipation were noticeable, but what affected Dick the most was the total absence of frankness or candor of look. But at all times, even when talking directly to a person, young Pierson evaded an open and direct look into that person's face. When anyone, theretofore silent, spoke, he turned a quick, though guarded and stealthy look upon him. The entrances of a servant always caused a slight start of surprise, quickly repressed. In nothing else, after the closest inspection, could Dick find cause for criticism at the elegant table of Mr. Hetlow. But he was not satisfied.

When dinner was over and the ladies had left the table, and a few glasses of wine were taken, Mr. Hetlow rose, saying that the coffee would be served in the library. Thither went the gentlemen.

When the doors were closed, Mr. Hetlow proceeded to the event of the night.

"Mr. Pierson," he began, "doubtless you were not a little surprised that I should request you, with whom I had no acquaintance, and in fact no knowledge of until a day or two ago, to visit me."

"I confess to some surprise," said his guest smiling, "yet I connected it with the call of Mr. Mason upon my father, that is to say, upon Mr. Pierson."

"You were quite right," continued Mr. Hetlow. "The request was a consequence of Mr. Mason's call upon Mr. Pierson. Under the supposition you were the person for whom I have been searching many days, I asked you to come to us that I might make a communication to you, which, if you are in fact the person and can establish your identity, it is your right to receive."

Mr. Hetlow paused to observe the effect of his remarks upon his guest and found him listening with interest and respect. Proceeding with the story of the

death of Samuel Dugdale, and of the estate seeking an heir, Mr. Hetlow told of the search set on foot by himself and conducted by Dick.

“ Now,” he said, “ while it is a fact that this search seems to have resulted in an end which I am free to confess I did not anticipate, still the indications are, strongly, that you are the missing heir to the Dugdale estate, for if Mr. Mason correctly understood Mr. Orton Pierson he received you in adoption from one James Powers, who declared you were a child of Edmund Dugdale who had died in his house.”

“ Heir to the Dugdale estate ! ” repeated the young man, with an excellent assumption of bewilderment, and turning to Dick, said :

“ I thought father said you told him a legacy only had fallen to me ? ”

“ That was an assumption of your father,” returned Dick smiling. “ At that time I did not think it my duty to undeceive him.”

“ No,” said Mr. Hetlow, “ if you are in fact the son of Edmund Dugdale, you are the heir to all of Samuel Dugdale’s estate, for he died intestate.”

The young man did not reply for some time, remaining silent, as if he was too much astonished and bewildered to speak. Dick, watching closely, could see no elation in him ; indeed, his face and manner had taken on a very sober air. Reaching forward, the young man took a cigar from the table, lit it, smoked it for a moment or two, as if unconscious of the act. Then, with an air of slight embarrassment, which became him well, he said :

“ If I have understood you aright, the discovery of myself and the establishment of my identity deprive Miss Hetlow of this fortune.”

“ Yes,” replied Mr. Hetlow gravely ; “ if it can be termed depriving her of that which was never hers, so long as the son of Edmund Dugdale existed.”

"Is it considerable?" he asked, modestly and rather timidly.

"It is vast," answered Mr. Hetlow solemnly, as be-fitted so important a statement. "One of the great fortunes of the world."

The young man seemed overwhelmed by amazement. He did not reply but smoked for some moments, puffing vigorously as if it were an escape for suppressed excitement. Perhaps there was real excitement, and not all of it acting.

"Surely," he said at length, "you will pardon me, if I seem to fail in a proper appreciation of your extraordinary statement. I am somewhat bewildered and do not seem to think clearly."

All this seemed so proper to Mr. Hetlow that he was strongly impressed in favor of the young man.

"To be thus suddenly raised from a condition of very limited means to the contemplation of the prospect of such wealth is confusing," he said, as if in apology.

Dick thought this was rather glib for a man professing to be so much amazed.

"Well," he went on, "really I do not know what to say. I never knew until some six years ago that I was the adopted son of Orton Pierson. At the time of the telling of it to me, and growing out of it, differences arose between my father and myself which sent me abroad. I never knew until after Mr. Mason's call that my name was Dugdale. And at this moment I know very little more. Mr. Pierson is a singular man in many respects, and I have learned more of my antecedents from you, Mr. Hetlow, than I ever knew before, supposing always I am the person you suppose me to be."

This was so modest in statement that all his witnesses were impressed by it.

"I am bound to admit," said Mr. Hetlow, "that the

indications are that you are the one we have been seeking."

"But," broke in Mr. Stanton for the first time, "you have a great deal to do before you can take possession. Upon you must rest the burden of proving your identity."

"I was coming to that," said Mr. Hetlow. "I assume I have done my whole duty in seeking out the son of Edmund Dugdale. And while I shall not put myself in an antagonistic attitude to you, it can hardly be expected of me that I should labor to the establishment of your identity, or that I should yield up my claim, on behalf of my daughter, before your right is fully and legally established. Informing you of the prospects before you, my duty ends."

"Of course, of course," said the supposed Dugdale, so hurriedly and absently as to take on the appearance of impatience. "I agree with you. You are right—very right."

After a silence of a moment or two, he spoke again and with an air and tone almost courtly :

"My astonishment over this information sir, is fully equaled by my admiration for your high-minded conduct—for your keen sense of honor. If I fail to show you my gratitude now, it is because I am hardly capable of thinking clearly to-night, but I am quite certain, whatever may be the final result, in time I can show it and show it to be sincere."

This speech also made a good impression. Bob was doing famously. Ransom would not have known him as the companion in his crimes and dissipations.

"I do not know how I shall go about the obtaining of this proof," he went on, after a little while ; "I must talk with Mr. Pierson. I don't even know what he knows or how much he knows. I presume the proper course would be to retain a lawyer and be guided by him."

"That certainly would be your wisest course," in-

terjected Mr. Stanton. "Retain a lawyer—a reputable lawyer."

Bob turned a brief, darting, suspicious glance on Mr. Stanton—a glance caught by Dick—but he said in an innocent air :

" You are a lawyer. Perhaps I can arrange with you."

" I am retained by the other side," replied the old lawyer curtly.

" I do not know that there is anything more to be said upon the subject," said Mr. Hetlow. " We have communicated the information to the family solicitor in London, and have asked him to come here, or send someone qualified to act, to conduct the investigation into your proof."

" I shall act upon it at once," said Bob. " Father said something about some papers and articles which would tend to the proof. I will return in the morning and secure them. And with your permission I will submit them early in the week."

" Do so," said Mr. Hetlow. " Run up here on Wednesday for the night."

When the Springhill contingent were walking back that night, Dick said to the lawyer :

" This young man perplexes me. He seems to have mixed much with refined and polite society. He is well acquainted with all its forms, even those minute matters which argue being to the manner born. Where did he acquire them? Not in the Pierson family, that I am willing to wager. Yet, notwithstanding his grace and polish—and he seems to carry with him the atmosphere of the great world quite as much as Merrimount does—his face makes me distrustful. I am conscious of a feeling of suspicion."

" Oh, ho!" exclaimed Mr. Stanton, " you noticed those things, did you? Well, I am with you in that. The final impression upon me was that of distrust and suspicion. Yet he bore himself well in the li-

brary. I cannot pick a flaw. The sensation is an elusive one. I cannot fix it. There must be a rigid examination."

"Yes; an examination which leaves no stone unturned," replied Dick.

CHAPTER XIX.

REBELLIOUS INDEPENDENCE.

SHORTLY after Harold Pierson had taken his departure from "The Larches," on the morning following the revelation to him, Mr. Hetlow and Bessie went over to Springhill.

Wallis and Dick were languidly playing a game of tennis, Mrs. Stanton watching them idly from the veranda ; Mr. Stanton had gone into the village.

Mr. Hetlow quite evidently wanted to discuss the claimant. Hence his visit so early in the morning. Wallis and Dick came from the tennis-court, racket in hand, and seated themselves upon the steps.

"What do you think of the young Dugdale, Mrs. Stanton ?" asked Mr. Hetlow, opening the subject nearest to his heart.

"Since you must lose the fortune, I think you should be satisfied that it is to go into such excellent hands," replied that lady. "I like him very much."

"Is that your opinion too, Wallis?" asked the merchant, turning to the young girl.

"No, it is not," decidedly replied that person. "I am not able to express my opinion in words. I cannot say just what I feel. I distrust him, yet cannot give a reason why."

"Do you mean you do not believe he is what he represents himself to be?" anxiously inquired Mr. Hetlow.

"Oh, dear, no!" Wallis hastened to exclaim. "I suppose the facts are too strong for that. But it is not that. Something whispers to me, when I think of him, 'Beware ! Beware !'"

"There," cried Bessie. "That just expresses my feeling. He is polite, well-bred in his manners, apparently modest, but something whispers to me too, 'Beware !'"

"And you, Mason?"

"I also distrust him, and also without good reason. Indeed, I fear my reasons would be regarded as fanciful. I distrust him, because he appears to me to distrust himself and all the world; because, not that he is polite, courteous, and refined, but because his manners are those of a man accustomed to the most polite and ceremonious world, from his childhood upward—of a man accustomed to no other world, until his manners had become fixed. Perhaps I do not make myself clear. I am trying to make that distinction which exists in the manners of a man who has formed them after having known another kind of life, and a man who knew no other life, until his manners had become fixed into a habit. It is more easily appreciated by me than stated."

"I understand you," said Mr. Hetlow. "The distinction is somewhat subtle, but it does exist."

"Well then, if we are to accept his statement of his upcoming, how are we to account for his minute and spontaneous familiarity with the forms obtaining in the ceremonious world? The last place we would expect a man so equipped to spring from, would be the humble household of Mr. Orton Pierson."

"I fear your point would not be accepted by the vast majority of people," replied Mr. Hetlow, with a laugh.

"I don't expect it to be accepted, sir," replied Dick soberly. "I do not think I should attempt to urge it in another place. I did express it to Mr. Stanton last evening, however, and found it received by him."

"Does Mr. Stanton distrust him too?" inquired Mr. Hetlow.

"Yes. He says that on his part it is instinct rather than reason. I watched Pierson closely last night, for I have regarded him as a suspect from the beginning, and I thought I discovered in him the want of certain moral qualities, without which he would be an undesirable friend."

"It is all prejudice," sharply interjected Mrs. Stanton; "prejudice without reason."

"That is what I fear," put in Dick earnestly. "Indeed I think all of us with the exception of Mrs. Stanton are inclined to regard Pierson as an interloper, forgetting that he is in the position he is, through our own acts."

"Perhaps!" remarked Mr. Hetlow, relapsing into thought.

After a few moments, during which all had been busy with their own thoughts, Dick said:

"You have not given us your opinion, sir."

"It is difficult for me to do so," rejoined Mr. Hetlow, arousing himself. "I was favorably impressed with him last evening—very favorably impressed. I thought he received the information, which was of so much moment, most excellently. Yet I feel the same mistrust you all say you feel. In trying to analyze my sensations, I have reached the conclusion, however, that it is distrust of the man himself, and not of the claimant. I wish Stanton were here. He is so clear-headed."

The conversation dragged, and the players joined by Bessie went back to their tennis. Mr. Hetlow talked in a desultory way with Mrs. Stanton. Presently the old merchant said, apropos of nothing:

"Mason is a fine fellow."

"Do you think so?" asked Mrs. Stanton in return, coldly.

"I do indeed," replied Mr. Hetlow. "I have watched him grow up. He was a fine lad and has fulfilled the promise of his boyhood. He has an ex-

cellent future before him, for his morals are good and his capacity for business far more than the ordinary."

Mrs. Stanton did not reply.

"He seems to be attentive to Wallis," continued the merchant after a pause. "He would make her a good husband. I think, were they to marry, it would be a good arrangement."

Mrs. Stanton laid her work down and looked with open astonishment at her visitor.

"Has it never occurred to you?" asked Mr. Hetlow, smiling.

"Occurred to me!" repeated the lady. "Why, bless you, he does not care for Wallis. Don't you know his heart has long been lost to Bessie?"

Mr. Hetlow was so startled and amazed that he turned almost fiercely upon Mrs. Stanton.

"To Bessie! He! He! His heart lost to Bessie!"

It was not Mrs. Stanton's purpose to make trouble, and it was only when she perceived the effect of her unguarded remark, that she recollected that she had revealed what she had been expressly cautioned to preserve as a secret. It was too late, however, to recall her words.

"Is this matter then of such common notoriety that it is surprising that I do not know it," he asked angrily. "Has this love-making been going on under my eyes and I not aware of it?" He was so angry that Mrs. Stanton was frightened.

"I—I—I did not say there had been love-making," she stammered. "I don't understand there has been any. I fear I have done wrong in saying a word."

"What am I to understand then?" demanded Mr. Hetlow. "Does Miss Hetlow reciprocate his affection?"

"No, no," cried the poor lady, much confused. "We've only noticed it here. I think he confessed his affection for Bessie to Wallis. I am quite sure he has

said nothing to Bessie. And yes—Wallis told me, he believed that Bessie regarded him disdainfully.

“As was quite proper,” said Mr. Hetlow loftily. “There is a great difference between them—a great social difference. It is very presumptuous of him.”

The poor lady in her fright and confusion stumbled into the remark, which of all others was calculated to allay Mr. Hetlow’s anger.

“You shouldn’t feel it that way,” she said. “It is only presumptuous of him to ask her to marry him. Any man may love. It is when he tells of his love that he is to be blamed. He thinks Bessie regards him only as her father’s clerk. You cannot blame him for loving so beautiful a girl as Bessie. Were he to make love to her then you might blame him.”

Mr. Hetlow was placated.

“Oh!” he exclaimed. “I understand the situation to be then that he nourishes an undeclared passion for Miss Hetlow. I have always believed him to be a man of high honor. It seems he is guided now by honorable purposes.”

Mrs. Stanton heaved a high sigh of relief as she caught at his words and said no more, leaving him to his belief. Mr. Hetlow, however, was greatly disturbed. He fidgeted about for some time, and finally, with a little asperity in his tones, called Bessie to him to return home.

His daughter obediently left the game and walked away with her father. She noticed that something had occurred to annoy him and also the coolness with which he treated Dick when he parted from him.

As soon as they were out of earshot her father said abruptly:

“I have heard an astonishing piece of news.”

Supposing it to relate to the all-engrossing topic, she asked indifferently :

“Something about Mr. Pierson?”

"No, about Mr. Mason."

"Mr. Mason?" she repeated, her heart beating fast and her color deepening.

"Yes, I learn he has had the audacity to lift his eyes to you—to permit himself the presumption of loving you."

For a moment or two her head reeled, and she walked on in great agitation. Her face was pale, and her heart seemed to be in her mouth. When she could control herself she asked :

"Where did you learn this astounding news?"

"From Mrs. Stanton."

Anger came to her aid in controlling herself. She said sharply, "Mrs. Stanton is meddling in affairs of no concern to her."

"They are of concern to me," retorted her father. "Is this so?"

"What? That it is of concern to you, or that Mrs. Stanton is a meddler in the affairs of others."

She was endeavoring to gain time.

"Do not trifle with me," commanded her father. "Do you say that Mr. Mason has dared to offer himself to you?"

"No," she answered, now in possession of herself. "Mr. Mason has not offered himself."

"Yet he loves you?"

"That may be."

"Answer my question. Has he ever asked you to be his wife?"

"No," she replied firmly. "The first day Mr. Mason came here he and I had a serious difference, growing out of a misapprehension of mine. I thought then, though I now know I misunderstood him, that he presumed to lecture me. Since then, and indeed until this week, our relations have not been pleasant. So much is true. Until then I thought Mr. Mason regarded me tenderly. Then I believed the contrary

and did so believe until, in conversation with him, I learned the mistake I had made."

Her words now came slowly, but only because she was carefully selecting them.

"During that conversation I came to know," she went on, "though I am sure Mr. Mason did not intend I should, that he loved me with a deep and enduring love. He was respectful and self-restrained. He did not offer his love, did not ask me to return it, did not ask me to be his wife."

She looked into her father's face and encountered his eyes bent upon her earnestly. Without faltering in her gaze, she went on :

"I do not know that he ever will. He believes I do not reciprocate his passion. I think, no, I am sure, he believes his love to be hopeless."

Her father's brow cleared as he listened to her, but she went on now more rapidly and with greater firmness.

"But, should he ever pay me the compliment—the highest a woman can receive—shall tell me of his love, and ask me to be wife to him, I shall say yes."

She bravely encountered the anger of her father. He stopped short in his walk, detaining her by grasping her arm. They were standing in the middle of the great field which separated Springhill from "The Larches."

"You dare to say that to your father?" he gasped out, almost choking with rage.

She did not quail an instant before him; but said as firmly as he could have done :

"Your daughter dares to say that she claims the right to choose her own husband, since she must live with him all her life."

"And your father dares to say he claims the right of bestowing his fortune where he chooses, since he has made it himself," he shouted.

"Threats are unnecessary," she replied calmly. "I do not deny your right. Since I was a very little girl I have loved Mr. Mason, and as I have grown older, and have been able to better appreciate his sterling qualities of heart and head, that love has deepened and strengthened, until I can think of no other man as my husband. Should you interpose your parental authority—well, I could only suffer. I have come to know what it will mean to me, since I have been forced to the belief that Mr. Mason will never declare his love for me."

"What shield is there in that?" contemptuously asked her father. "Will not a woman find a way to show her lover his love is not hopeless?"

"Do not forget that, though confessing my love, I am yet a woman."

The calm dignity of the reply confused the old merchant, and this made him angry.

"And you would make this clerk your husband?"

"At his age Howard Hetlow was a clerk, yet he presumed to love and marry his employer's sister."

"The case is not analogous."

"I cannot see why it is not," replied Bessie decidedly. "Mr. Mason is a gentleman. He was the nephew and adopted son of your warmest friend. He is of strict honor, excellent morals, and of more than usual ability, as I have heard you say a score of times. As I have said, regardless of all consequences, were he to ask me to be his wife, I would proudly and gladly say yes."

Angered as he was Mr. Hetlow could not but admire his daughter. She was displaying a spirit he had not dreamed she possessed. In an instant, before his eyes, she had been transformed from a weak, clinging, obedient girl into a strong, forceful, and charming woman. He almost stood in awe of her, and wondered what had caused the great and sudden change. He did not know the test through which Bessie had re-

cently passed, silently working a revolution. He did not understand that from having passed from a condition of doubt and uncertainty—almost, if not wholly despair—into an assurance of Dick's strong love, she was now rejoicing in the knowledge of it. He knew neither how to reply, nor what to say. In argument she had met him, and his covert threat of disinheritance had fallen upon indifferent ears. Her allusion to his own past had affected him more than he was willing to admit. She had presented himself to himself, as a purseproud man who wanted to forget his own uprising. The picture of his own youth and struggles was vividly before him. He contrasted, involuntarily, the past youth of Howard Hetlow with the present youth of Richard Mason, and not wholly to the disadvantage of Mason. He could not summon a single essential fault against the man his daughter had so bravely asserted she loved—only one, and that, that at the age of twenty-six his future was not assured. Yet he, Hetlow, was two years older before his feet were firmly placed upon the lowest round of that ladder by which he had mounted to riches and power. Through his mind flitted the vexing idea that it was within his power to place the feet of Mason on the same ladder, the mounting of which, he could not but confess, could be safely left to this able and energetic young man.

As he was thus thinking they had reached the stile which let them into their own grounds.

Suddenly Bessie spoke.

“This is a useless discussion. After what has passed between us, Mr. Mason will never make a tender of his love for me. But I shall regret very much, and it will add to the sorrow and distress under which I am now, if you permit this frankness of mine to interfere with Mr. Mason's relations to your business.”

“I think I know how to separate my business

interests from my domestic affairs, without instructions from my daughter," answered Mr. Hetlow grimly. "My partners would not accept, as a sufficient justification for the dismissal of a valued assistant, the fact that he aspired to the hand of my daughter. Over my house, however, I am absolute, and Mr. Mason must no longer be received here."

Bessie made no reply and they walked on in silence. At the door of the library they parted; Mr. Hetlow entered that room by no means satisfied. It was true he had asserted his authority as the master of his home, but he was not at all certain that he had asserted his authority as a parent in that forceful and impressive manner he was wont to employ. He had been astonished and somewhat confused by his daughter's sudden display of spirit and firmness. Her attitude did not seem to admit of argument, and she did not admit his right to interfere. The revelation of this new phase of her character had so amazed him that, in his endeavor to comprehend it, he had neglected to combat it, and it was now a question whether he had not permitted the opportunity to exert his authority to pass from him. He was also influenced by another consideration. From what Bessie had said, Mason had made no proffer of his love. After all he could not expect to control emotions, for men could not control them themselves. So long as Mason refrained from tendering his love to Bessie, he could not see how he could interfere. The trouble was that Bessie, by her own confession, was ready to yield when asked. Would she not find a way to elicit that tender? True, Bessie had rebuked him for suggesting that she would. The more he thought of it all, the more perplexed he grew. He could not bring himself to the determination to warn or threaten Mason. He might be told to wait until cause for admonition presented itself. What he could do, and this he would, would be to put an end

to Dick's visits to "The Larches." As for the rest he would await developments.

Having made her brave declaration and defiance, Bessie's courage failed her. Once safe in her room, she began to torture herself with the fear that she had by her boldness involved Dick in trouble. But above all she feared that in his present vexed temper, her father would put some indignity upon Dick, should he appear at "The Larches"; so, acting upon impulse, she indited this note to Dick :

"Please do not come to 'The Larches' until I can see you. This is not an idle request. I wish to save you from embarrassment. I will soon seek a meeting with you."

She hastily dispatched it, failing to appreciate the construction that might be placed upon it until it had passed beyond her power to recall it. Then only she realized the position she had placed herself in.

Vexed with herself, she could think of no other course than to fling herself on her lounge and have a good cry.

CHAPTER XX.

DICK'S DISCOVERY.

DICK remained at Springhill until Monday. He had hoped to have an interview with Bessie and an explanation of her mysterious note. But he was compelled to depart without a word from her. Wallis had gone to "The Larches," on Sunday morning, promising to bring him information, but upon her return, she was mysterious and uncommunicative. Pressed for an explanation, she replied that her mouth was sealed and she could tell him nothing. She assured him, however, that there was in the note no cause for despair, and that he ought to know that only a sincere interest in himself dictated its writing. Further she insisted that he must obey the note literally and wait for the chance of a meeting with Bessie, when she would explain everything to his satisfaction. Forced to be content with this Dick went away early Monday morning.

In the meantime Bob had conferred with his co-conspirators. He had related to them all the details of his visit and had made them understand that the success of their scheme depended upon their efforts; that with having found the supposed Dugdale and informed him of his prospects the Hetlow party would do no more in helping him to possession, but would from thence out assume the attitude of insisting upon absolute proof of identity before foregoing Miss Hetlow's claims upon the property.

That which troubled Orton Pierson and Moore most was the knowledge that the fact of the dis-

covery of the supposed heir had been forwarded to the London solicitor, with the request that he would come to the States and take charge of the examination.

It was Moore, who, after prolonged discussion, summed the matter up.

"We must expect, from this out, opposition from the Hetlow party," he said. "Probably it will be the passive one of questioning proof, but it will be opposition all the same. Now it seems to me that we are not going to drift into this thing, as it seemed at first. This London solicitor will come here to make a searching examination, and this thing we want to stop. The way to do it, it seems to me, is to produce the strongest kind of proof and submit it to the Hetlow party--proof so strong that they will be convinced. This must be done before the London lawyer arrives, so that, when he does come, he will find those most interested in having the proof fail ready to yield up all claim. This will prejudice him in our favor."

This seeming to be the wisest course it was agreed upon, and the duty of determining what proof was necessary, and of concocting it, was imposed upon Moore and Pierson.

"That proof must be ready by Wednesday," said Bob, "for I have promised to go up there on that day and submit what we have."

"That is all right," said Orton Pierson. "You can carry up all the proof we have then, and we will give you enough for the first step. It will be the better way to convince them gradually. From what Bob says," he continued to the others, "I think they are really convinced now, and proof is all that is wanted to make them throw up their hands."

"All are convinced except Mason," replied Bob. "That fellow doesn't believe in me. I feel that he

distrusts and suspects me. He doesn't know what to take hold of, but he suspects something, and we can expect a fight from him."

"We must silence him then," remarked Ransom grimly.

"Nothing violent," protested Pierson quickly. "If there is to be anything of that kind, I'm out of the matter at once."

"No, no," put in Moore. "Nothing of that kind."

"There are more ways of silencing him than cutting off his wind, isn't there?" asked Ransom contemptuously. "You can make it worth his while to drop the business, can't you?"

"You can't get enough money to make him do that, Ransom," said Bob quietly.

"Well, there is some way," returned Ransom. "I'll make it my business to look after my friend Mason."

While the precious quartette were scheming and Ransom was devising some plan to neutralize Dick as a suspicious and dangerous person to them, Dick was devoting himself to his duties at the office, long neglected. He had returned to them, on the whole, in a contented frame of mind. He was under no doubt that the meaning of the writing of the note was that in some way Mr. Hetlow had discovered his love for Bessie and had threatened to deny him the house. And while that seemed to promise obstruction to his suit, the fact which was important to him was that Bessie had shown a deep interest in himself and his well being and had promised to see him and explain. There was such assurance of her love in this that Mr. Hetlow's opposition seemed insignificant beside it. So he took up his duties quite cheerfully.

While he had been devoting himself to the search for young Dugdale, the interests of his department had been largely confided to an assistant. Growing out of some differences between this assistant and

certain of the subordinates, irregularities in a warehouse of the concern, immediately under Dick's charge, had become apparent. This warehouse was situated in Jackson Street, on the east side of the city, not far from the East River. One of the first things he found to do was an investigation of these irregularities, and on Monday morning he had gone thither for that purpose.

Adjoining this warehouse was a small hotel, largely patronized by longshoremen, and also frequented by others, whom the police believed to be connected with river piracy. It could hardly be said that the place was under surveillance. No disturbances occurred there calling for police interference, nor was it charged that crime was committed there. Order was maintained among a class of customers prone to turbulence by the proprietor, who when occasion occurred could and did exercise a physical power that made all stand in awe of him. While crimes were not charged against this man, and while he avoided violations of the law, yet vague rumors were afloat as to a former life led by him, when such could not have been said of him.

The first floor of this house was largely given up to the liquor business, which evidently was the largest source of profit to the establishment. In the rear of the bar-room was a small room containing chairs and tables and little else, which was called the reading-room. This room was lit by two windows—one upon the side looking out upon the alley way which separated the hotel from the warehouse owned by Hetlow, Altmount & Co., and the other looked out upon a small yard behind the house, which was filled with dog-kennels.

In the rear of the warehouse was an office which was also lit by a window looking out upon the alley way spoken of above. This office room was located in a part of the warehouse, far back of the rear line

of the hotel. At a certain period of the day before noon, the sun, when well advanced toward meridian, shone directly through the rear window of the reading-room of the hotel, filling it with light. At such a time it was possible for one standing at the window of the office of the warehouse to see into the reading-room and distinctly recognize those who occupied it.

Dick, who had been engaged for some time in the office on this Monday morning examining the books, finally rose from the desk at which he had been at work, and went to the single window of the room. As he looked out engrossed in thought, he was startled by recognizing in the reading-room of the hotel Harold Pierson, as he knew him, otherwise Bob, and Ransom, the man who had given him the information which led to the discovery of the supposed Dugdale heir. A second glance showed him that these two, with two others, were gathered about a table, and of the other two, one seemed to be a man employed by Mr. Hetlow at "The Larches"; the other he did not know.

He peered through the window earnestly. There could be no doubt they were the men he supposed them to be. What startled him was, not that they were in that place, but that Ransom and Harold Pierson should be together. Ransom had pretended to have no acquaintance with either Orton or Harold Pierson. And in his conversation with him, Orton Pierson had denied knowledge of Ransom.

While he was thus looking upon them earnestly, he saw the fourth man, whom he did not know, look up and discover him. The attention of the others was directed to him. He stepped back quickly—so quickly that the other three, who sprang to their feet immediately, were not able to see him. The incident took complete possession of him. The more he thought of it, the more perplexed he became. Moreover it unfitted him

for the duty which had taken him to the warehouse. After a vain endeavor to give his attention to his business, he postponed further labor until the next day, and taking his hat went out into the street.

As he stepped from the door of the warehouse he perceived Ransom in conversation with the fourth man, on the pavement in front of the hotel. His first impulse was to go back and thus avoid a meeting. A second thought, however, determined him to go forward and pass the two without recognition. But as he attempted to do so, Ransom stepped in front of him, and in his dulcet tones said :

“This is Mr. Mason, I believe ?”

“Yes,” Dick replied curtly.

“I thought so. I’m not often mistaken in faces. Did you ever find the man you were looking for ? Was the man I told you of the one ?”

These questions were asked with an excellent assumption of interest.

“Yes,” replied Dick coldly, with a grave face, maintaining a reserve amounting to severity. “Yes, I found the man, and I saw him a short time ago in a room in this place with you.”

“In there ?” said Ransom, with well assumed astonishment. “You are mistaken, surely. A few minutes ago I was in the reading-room of this hotel with three men, whom I met on business here. This gentleman,” indicating the one whom he had been talking with and who was still standing by, “was one of them. He’s the captain of a stone scow. The others were contractors for cut stone. I’m in the quarry business. Their names are Johnson and Nesmith—partners. No, you are mistaken.”

The guilelessness with which this was said staggered Dick and for the time induced him to believe that he was mistaken. So he bowed slightly but still haughtily, and went his way.

Ransom watched him turn the corner. Apparently satisfying himself that Dick had really gone, he went into the hotel where he was joined by Bob.

“Has he gone?” Bob asked.

“Yes, he’s off.”

“Did he see me?”

“Yes; but I think I drove him out of that idea. What infernal luck! This is the last place in which I would have expected to meet him.”

“Didn’t you know that this warehouse belonged to Hetlow, Altmont & Co.?” asked Bob complainingly.

“No, I only knew a warehouse was here.”

“It’s a fine kettle of fish to put before Pierson and Moore,” said Bob, as they walked away.

In the meantime Dick had gone directly to the Cliff Street office. As he walked along the street, he thought upon the incident, returning to the belief that Harold Pierson was in that room, and he determined that Ransom had purposely put himself in his way to throw him out of that belief.

Arriving at the office, and, upon inquiry, finding that Mr. Hetlow was in his room, Dick went to him.

Dick was keenly observant when he entered the room, for he expected to find something to confirm his theory as to Bessie’s note. A slight chilliness of demeanor and some little constraint was all he could observe.

Having related the incident of the morning, he waited for some comment from the merchant.

“But it seems from the man Ransom’s statement you were mistaken.” was Mr. Hetlow’s first remark.

“I don’t think I was,” replied Dick positively. “The more I think of it the more I am satisfied I was not.”

“How much of a trick has your imagination played you?” asked Mr. Hetlow. “You know your mind has been upon this matter and its associations for many days, to the exclusion of ever——” he stopped

suddenly as he thought of the story of Dick's love for Bessie.

"Of everything else, you would say," Dick went on, completing the sentence. "I'm not particularly imaginative, sir, and I am quite certain my imagination has not tricked me. I am positive I saw Harold Pierson with Ransom, and I would so testify under oath before a jury."

"Well, suppose you did?" asked Mr. Hetlow in a controversial tone. "Of what significance would it be?"

"Well, sir," replied Dick thoughtfully "under all the circumstances, it seems to me, it would be of the greatest significance. Let me argue it, if you please. We put an advertisement in the papers asking anyone having knowledge of Edmund Dugdale to communicate with me. In the course of time Ransom appears, assuming to have knowledge of him, of Powers, of the child, and of its adoption but—and here is the first point—he has no recollection of the person or persons adopting the child. Subsequently, after a reasonable time, he writes a letter in which he says he has recollected the name and it is Pierson, which letter—and here is the second point—is couched in such terms as to convey the idea that he has no knowledge of, or acquaintance with, the people. Yet, notwithstanding all this, the next time I see him, I find him in company with Harold Pierson, who purports to be young Dugdale, and when I intimate I have seen him in such company he denies it. Now, sir, if there was no significance in these facts, if he had made Dugdale's or Harold Pierson's acquaintance subsequent to his calling upon me, either by accident, or by open effort, if he did not want to still leave me in the same mind that he did not know him, why did he deny it? Now, sir" continued Dick, growing more argumentative, "the place, which I know is not a reputable place, is the last place a man of the breeding of Harold Pier-

son would think of visiting—this also is suspicious and significant."

"You do not deny that Harold Pierson is, so far as we can judge, from manner and breeding, a gentleman?"

"No, sir," replied Dick, "I do not; yet I know that on seeing him I was instinctively filled with distrust."

Mr. Hetlow had felt something of this and was silent for some time.

"Then there is something else," Dick went on after a while. "The day I arrived at Springhill—the day. I mean, you were upon your yacht—I wandered to the river and watched from the rocks a boat pulling for the shore to land a man. This man seemed to me to be one in your employ. The man pulling the boat was Ransom, I thought. The man landing and in your employ was in this group to-day. Again, the night that Lord Merrimount was attacked on your grounds, when he, Miss Hetlow, Miss Gladwin, and myself were walking, I thought, as I ran to Merrimount's assistance, that the man attacking him was Ransom. He was running away at the time and it was dark, to be sure, but I said at the time I thought it was he."

"You make a strong case," said Mr. Hetlow smiling, "but after all, is it not based upon unsubstantial grounds? It seems so to me."

"It may be," replied Dick. "But I am very strongly impressed that something is wrong."

"Let us assume," suggested Mr. Hetlow, "that all these things are really as you suppose them to be and they actually are—your conclusion would be what?"

"That there is a conspiracy on foot to possess themselves of this great wealth. That is the logical conclusion we must come to."

The old merchant seemed shocked by Dick's words and manner.

"Your conclusion is a startling one," he said. "I cannot follow you in it."

"Well, sir, starting with the assumption you yourself made, there can be no other outcome," replied Dick, firmly but respectfully.

"Your grounds are too vague, too unsubstantial," said the old merchant sharply.

Dick did not reply for a time. Both were thinking on their own lines and both would have been startled had each given the other his thoughts.

Finally Dick broke the silence by asking:

"Mr. Hetlow, if you assume that Harold Pierson is in fact young Dugdale, the search for Dugdale is ended, and the commission I received at your hands six weeks ago is accomplished."

"I presume so," replied the merchant indifferently.

"If that view is taken by you I will ask to be relieved from further charge of the matter, and beg to be permitted to return to the duties of my department. In some things it is suffering for want of proper attention."

The old merchant was now interested.

"But I don't think the matter has reached the point where we can assume that. I think you should still devote some further time to the matter."

"Then, sir, I should ask to be permitted to pursue an investigation on the lines I have suggested this morning."

"You seem strangely persistent in this."

"Perhaps I am. As I have said I am strongly impressed. My suspicions have been aroused and are alert. There is, however, another matter influencing me. It was pointed out to me by Mr. Stanton, though it had never been in my mind until then, that in view of the——" he brought himself up with a round turn, for in his earnestness he was about to admit to Mr. Hetlow his fondness for Bessie, but recovering quickly on thinking that if ever there was an issue to be made between Mr. Hetlow and himself on this matter, there could be no better time, he went on—"that in view of a certain fact, the mention of which is not es-

sential to my point, I might be open to the charge of producing a Dugdale in any event. Since that might occur, and since I did find a supposed Dugdale in Harold Pierson, it behooves me, in protection of my own honor, to be sure the *real* Dugdale is found."

Mr. Hetlow had instinctively felt that Bessie was in some manner involved in this point, but how he could not see. If Dick had hopes of securing his daughter's hand, he might naturally wish her to have all the money she could have. Perhaps this was the motive of Dick's persistency he thought, but he evaded the issue presented. He was not ready for the struggle.

"Well, Mason, perhaps there is a great deal in what you say" he said, after some thought. "To be frank with you, I must say I don't think there is. Suppose we postpone any conclusion until we can consult Stanton. I shall not go to Dobbs Ferry to-night. I have a meeting to attend this evening. But I'll go up to-morrow. You come up too. Wednesday you know Harold Pierson is to come to us, and I want you to be there. So you come up and——" he in his turn brought himself up short, for he was heedlessly rushing in to do what he had only two days ago declared he would not do, but went on—"and we'll talk it over."

"Very well," said Dick. "Until then we'll leave matters as they are."

He left the apartment puzzled by Mr. Hetlow's contradictory attitude.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TIN BOX.

THOUGH he had acquiesced in Mr. Hetlow's suggestion that no action should be taken until Mr. Stanton should be consulted, Dick was not satisfied. The incident of the day grew in importance the more he considered it. The companionship of Harold Pierson and Ransom might be satisfactorily explained, but at present in his eyes it had a decidedly sinister appearance. Mr. Hetlow's disinclination to accord any importance to his theory nettled him, and he was doubtless influenced to some extent by his chagrin, when he finally determined to get certain inquiries on foot without further delay.

Accordingly he sought Captain Lawton in his office. To that celebrated detective he related the events with which the reader is familiar, closing with his experience of the morning.

"Now," continued Dick, "this may or may not appear significant to you, but to me it seems most important."

"It seems so suspicious to me," replied the captain, "that I think an investigation should be begun without delay."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," said Dick, highly pleased to have his judgment confirmed. "Mr. Hetlow evidently regards my suspicion and theory as fanciful. But I think he is influenced by a matter, not even remotely connected with this case, but which disposes him to look upon me with some disfavor."

"I do not know that upon the grounds you present

I should be disposed to accept your theory, but the facts you have presented certainly justify examination," remarked the captain.

"Perhaps I am influenced to a degree by the impressions the young man Pierson has made upon me," returned Dick. "These I cannot communicate to you, but if I could, I think you would see that I have some justification for my theory. However, I want to know all I can know about Ransom, Orton Pierson, and Harold Pierson, and what, if any, relation or acquaintanceship exists between them, how close it is, and how long it has existed. To know that these inquiries are being made would give me an ease of mind I would not have if they were not on foot."

Captain Lawton promised to make the investigation and report as promptly as he could.

The following day brought forth nothing, and Dick without interruption devoted himself to the duties of his department. On Wednesday morning, however, he received a message from Captain Lawton which caused him to felicitate himself for having set the inquiry on foot. The captain's message was to the effect, that while he had not been able to progress very far, he had yet learned that Ransom was a frequent visitor at Orton Pierson's house; that, in company with a Tombs lawyer named Moore, he waited at Pierson's office for Harold Pierson's return on Saturday morning. The significant point of the message was, that Captain Lawton had come to know that Dick was himself followed by a man wherever he went, and had been since Monday night. For what purpose the captain could not determine, but he warned Dick to govern himself by the knowledge and not betray any recognition of it, because that shadow was shadowed by one of Captain Lawton's men, charged with the duty of finding out its meaning.

It was shortly after he received this information,

that Dick set out for Springhill in conformity with the desires of Mr. Hetlow that he should be present at the time of Harold Pierson's second visit to "The Larches."

No sooner had he entered the car which was to convey him to Dobbs Ferry, than his eyes fell upon young Pierson, who recognized him at once with a courteous bow. Dick returned the salutation somewhat coldly, hoping thereby to be left to himself. But he had not seated himself before Bob moved across the car and taking a seat in front of him, saying :

"We are fellow-travelers."

"Yes, you of course are bound for 'The Larches.'"

The purpose young Pierson had in talking with Dick, and as well the policy which had been determined upon by the conspirators as to the awkward discovery by Dick of Harold in Ransom's company, was made apparent.

"I am going to 'The Larches,'" replied Bob, "rather in obedience to the understanding of last week than in any belief that I shall advance my claim. Father has found something which my lawyer says is proof, but which I am bound to confess does not appear conclusive to me. He says there are other papers which he may be able to find and which he says are much stronger. Were it not that it is at Mr. Hetlow's suggestion, and that it would seem childish and discourteous to refuse, I would not think of submitting this stuff. It is really embarrassing to go to 'The Larches,' for I cannot divest myself of the idea that I am seeking to deprive the Hetlow family of an estate that belongs to it by right. Indeed this feeling was so strong upon me that I was disposed to hunt you up in the city and ask you to convey the proof to Mr. Hetlow."

"I saw you on Monday," said Dick coldly, eying him keenly.

"Indeed, where?" asked Bob, apparently much interested.

"In Jackson Street, in a hotel adjoining our warehouse."

"Oh, yes, did you indeed? Rum place, isn't it? I never was there before."

His frank admission actually confounded Dick, who had prepared himself for a courteous denial.

"So that big building is your warehouse?" returned Bob. "It is not particularly ornamental, but it certainly is substantial and extensive. I don't remember to have ever been in that part of the town before. A man named Ransom hunted me up, declaring that he knew my father—that is Dugdale, if I am Dugdale—this having two fathers is confusing—where was I?—Oh, he hunted me up and said he could help me prove my identity, and carried me over to that place to see a man who could give me proof. I don't know whether there is anything in it or not, but he says he can substantiate father's statement, that is Mr. Person's statement, that he received me from Powers, and that the child given up by James Powers was a child of Dugdale the dead lodger of Powers."

"I saw Ransom; he denied that you were there," said Dick, hardly yet recovered from his confusion.

"Denied it? What for?" Bob's innocence was imitable.

"I am unable to tell."

"That is singular," mused Bob. "Why should he deny my being there? There was no reason for secrecy. Perhaps he thought you were antagonistic to me and that he was serving me in denying my presence there."

"Perhaps!" Dick said, and asked, "How long have you known Ransom?"

"Since last Saturday or Sunday—which was it? Saturday, that was the day."

Dick's house was a house of cards and was tumbled

to the ground, if this were the truth. Under the influence of Bob's frankness, Dick thawed and actually became genial. The conversation drifted into other channels, and they conversed easily until they reached the station where they were to leave the cars.

Mr. Hetlow had sent his carriage to meet Harold Pierson. As the latter undertook to enter it, he asked Dick if he would not ride with him. Dick, however, in no mood to accept the hospitality of Mr. Hetlow, and especially by proxy, made some excuse and turned away. As he did so he saw Wallis leaning from her carriage, endeavoring to attract his attention.

"I fancied you would come by this train, so I drove down for you," she said, as he approached. "I want to talk with you. I was afraid you might do or say something that would prevent you from doing what we want you to do."

"And who may this 'we' be?" asked Dick.

"Bessie and myself. Mr. Hetlow expects you to go over to 'The Larches' with us to-night. And Bessie got into a state of mind over the fear that because of her letter you would refuse to come. Now, since Mr. Hetlow has never carried out his threat, you see it would look as if Bessie had communicated it to you, if you refused to go."

"Oh, so Mr. Hetlow did threaten to deny me the house?"

Wallis laughed merrily.

"That is one little kitten out of the bag."

"Perhaps you'll let enough other little kittens out to make a whole cat," said Dick, "so as to relieve me from my distressful condition."

"If you are patient and very watchful perhaps they may come," replied Wallis. "I see that Mr. Pierson came up in the same train. Do you know anything more?"

"Little going to prove his identity—a great deal toward setting up doubts and suspicions."

Then he told her the occurrences of the day and added :

“The man puzzles me. There is so much about him that is suave and persuasive, contradictory and distrustful, that I am perplexed. I doubt my conclusions and sensations when I am with him. I distrust him most strongly when I am not. And so I swing between distrust and confidence.”

Their talk had brought them to Springhill, where they found Mr. Stanton awaiting them at the front entrance.

“Get out, Wallis,” he exclaimed, as they drove up. “You stay in, Mason. I want to go to the village. Drive with me, so I can talk to you.”

Thus commanded Wallis dismounted, and Dick drove off with Mr. Stanton.

It was yet quite early in the afternoon, and Wallis thought she would run over to “The Larches” and relieve Bessie from her apprehensions as to Dick’s conduct.

There was another passenger upon the cars, unnoticed by Dick, who, if he had seen her, would have undoubtedly altered the course of this story very considerably. Hardly had Mr. Stanton turned out of one gate, than another carriage drove in the other gate.

From it, at the front entrance alighted Mrs. Jenkins bearing in her hand a tin box. As before she wore the red shawl, the vivid color of which caught the eye of Mrs. Stanton, who was in the hall.

She hurried forward to meet the newcomer, much excited and flurried. Curiosity struggled with anger for her possession, but curiosity won the day, and under its influence she was enabled, with comparative calmness, to meet the woman whose existence, first in her dreams, and then in the flesh, had given her so much uneasiness.

“I wish to see Mr. Mason,” said Mrs. Jenkins.

“He is not here,” said Mrs. Stanton, “although he is expected this afternoon.”

In this she was truthful, for she did not know that Dick had arrived.

"Is Mr. Stanton here then?"

"No, he is not here. I heard him say he was going to the village."

Mrs. Jenkins seemed to be greatly disappointed. Indeed she said so, and added :

"I have come all the way from Philadelphia to bring this box."

Mrs. Stanton, who was trembling with excitement and hesitation over the fact that she was alone with the woman and on the eve of making a great discovery, could not control herself for the moment. Mrs Jenkins went on.

"Are you Mrs. Stanton?"

"I am," said that lady. "And I am glad you recognize it."

Mrs. Jenkins looked up at her astonished, but went on :

"No doubt you know what my business is here?"

"I know well enough what it is, and that it is not what they say it is."

Again Mrs. Jenkins looked at her, astonished more at her tone than her words.

"Oh, then, if that is so I can talk about it."

"Oh, yes; you can talk. I wish you would. Where is the baby?"

"That I don't know," said Mrs. Jenkins seriously, "but I am quite certain that this box tells all about it, and my husband thinks so too."

"Oh, you have a husband then?"

"Certainly I have. I've been married seven years."

"Oh, you have. Does he agree to all this business?"

"Why, yes, why should he not?"

"Some husbands might object; yours seems very complacent."

"He is a good man—very good to me."

"He must be. Are you the woman who put the baby away for adoption?"

"Why, no; of course not. I am a daughter of the woman."

Mrs. Stanton stared and murmured:

"Worse and worse. But the cards and my dreams said it was a blonde woman in a red shawl." Then suddenly she asked:

"Was your mother a blonde woman, and did she wear a red shawl?"

"Why, yes," replied Mrs. Jenkins; "my mother was a blonde, and she did wear this very shawl."

Mrs. Stanton was so relieved and confirmed that she was quite happy and changed her tone toward Mrs. Jenkins.

"It is all right then. Well, what more have you to say?"

"I have nothing more to say than I have told you. All I can tell and perhaps more is to be found in this box. I am sorry not to have seen Mr. Mason, but he will know all about it. My mother was Mrs. Powers. She cared for the baby of Mr. Dugdale after Mrs. Tomlinson gave it up, and she gave it out for adoption—she and my father that is—and it is all to be found there in this box."

She rose to her feet and, handing the box to Mrs. Stanton, she said:

"I cannot wait, for I want to go back on the next train to meet my husband. Will you hand that box to Mr. Mason?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Stanton grimly, "I'll hand it to Mr. Mason," and she added in an under breath, "when I've examined the box myself."

She accompanied Mrs. Jenkins to the veranda and saw her drive off. Then returning she caught up the box, which she had laid on the table, exclaiming:

"Now, we'll get at the bottom of this mystery. Dugdale, indeed! How they do try to deceive me."

And how well they've trained this woman to carry out the deceit."

She tried to open the box. It was locked.

"Ah! it is locked," she cried, in bitter disappointment. "That is another of their tricks. I suppose Mr. Mason has the key. Well," she cried, with sudden determination, "that won't save them. They will not see the inside of it until I have, key or no key."

She hurried off to conceal the box.

When Wallis returned she found her aunt greatly excited, but was unable to obtain any reason, beyond some mysterious hints as to having the key to the mystery which had for so long a time baffled her.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. STANTON'S INTRIGUE.

ON this occasion the Stanton family was not asked to dine with the claimant. Consequently before the people from Springhill reached "The Larches," dinner had been dispatched. Mrs. Stanton and Wallis sought Bessie in the drawing-room, while Mr. Stanton and Dick went into the library, where Mr. Hetlow and Harold Pierson were smoking.

Dick had hoped for a meeting with Bessie if only for a moment, and indeed Wallis had endeavored to bring one about, but Mr. Stanton had prevented it, by insisting that Dick should accompany him at once to the library.

Whatever fear Bob might have entertained as to the effect of the discovery made by Dick on the previous Monday, it was quite apparent that he had been reassured by the welcome accorded him by Mr. Hetlow. When Mr. Stanton and Dick entered he was enjoying his cigar with a serene confidence that greatly impressed Dick.

Before he took a seat, Dick asked a few moments' private conversation with Mr. Hetlow.

The old merchant was not a little astonished at the request, but nevertheless accorded it. To him Dick related the conversation with Harold Pierson on the cars, and concluding, said :

"I feel I have unduly prejudiced you by what I told you on Monday, and it seemed to me due to young Pierson that I should, before you go on with this talk to-night, tell you this."

"I am very glad you have," warmly replied Mr.

Hetlow. "But your fair-mindedness does not astonish me. This conversation puts the suspicion you entertained to rest."

This was not the effect Dick desired to produce. But he could not change it now, and they returned to the others.

It was Bob himself who opened the subject :

"When I was last here," he said, "it was understood that I should return to-day and present such proof as was at my command, going to establish my identity as young Dugdale. I am here for that purpose, and I have here——"

"One moment," interrupted Mr. Stanton. "Mr. Hetlow, it is but just that Mr. Pierson should be acquainted with the fact that we are, in the nature of things, antagonists, and that there is no obligation resting upon Mr. Pierson to disclose his proof to you—to the other side, who might thereby take an advantage of him. Since he is not represented or advised by counsel, it is but fair to say so."

"That is true, Mr. Pierson," promptly said Mr. Hetlow.

"I understand the spirit of fairness which prompts the remark," said Bob, "and I thank you. But I do not apprehend that an unfair advantage will be taken by anyone who can preface a consultation by such a warning. However, I desire to say that, if this property is ever to come to me, I want it to come with the full acquiescence of all here. Therefore I propose to show you here to-night all the proof I have. I am bound to say that it does not appear to me to be much."

He took from his pocket a package, which he unwrapped.

"Here," he said, "is a ring which my father says was taken from my father's hand—I beg pardon—I will phrase it this way; which Mr. Pierson says was taken from Edmund Dugdale's hand after death. It is

much worn as you will perceive ; also that the seal is so battered that the insignia is almost undecipherable. I am well enough acquainted with these things to know that it is a ring of rare make, but I cannot see that any proof exists in it."

It was passed from hand to hand and returned to him.

"Then," he went on, "there is here a bit of poetry addressed to one 'Loie,' whoever that may be, which seems to have been keyed in the sentiment that the 'world's well lost for love.' It intimates that that is what the writer has done, yet is well content."

This was passed around.

As Dick took it he said :

"Loie was the given name of Edmund Dugdale's wife."

"Ah ! It is proof then, to a certain degree," said Mr. Stanton.

"Then here is another bit of poetry in the same hand, addressed to a newly-born babe, wherein the writer upbraids the father for having forfeited the place in the world which he received at his birth, so that he could not transmit it to the child for whose existence he was responsible."

"It can be made to work into the proof effectively," remarked Mr. Stanton.

"Here is a sheet of paper," he went on, "upon which was begun a statement, in which evidently the writer proposes to give the essential particulars of his life. It begins :

“I propose, while strength is yet permitted me, to set down the important facts and events of my life. My days are numbered upon this earth. I am convinced that I shall soon follow in the way of my wife, awaiting me, who is in Heaven, where so good a woman must be.”

Dick was struck by the resemblance of this sentence to one used by the old man Pierson, in his conversation with him, applying it then to Mrs. Pierson.

““Must be [went on Bob, reading]. I leave my only child to the tender mercies of a world which for the past years has been cold and heartless to me.

““My name is Edmund Dugdale. I am now twenty-six—I am a son of Samuel Dugdale, a man of great wealth and a merchant of London. I have named my child after him, though I have been discarded by him since I crowned my follies in his eyes by marrying a public dancer. I had given myself up to the frivolities and gayeties of the world, refusing to acknowledge the traditions of my house, which, if followed, would have led me into the counting-room of Samuel Dugdale & Son and into a commercial career. But these my father forgave, believing that in time I would tire of them and devote myself to business. When, however, I married my poor——”

“Here,” said Bob, “the manuscript stops suddenly, an interruption having occurred, for the sheet is not wholly covered. I have also, and finally, this beginning of a letter, undated :

“*My dear Father:* In the agony of distress, weeping over the body of my wife, starved before my eyes without my ability to avert it, clasping my offspring in my arms, your grandson, I have determined to make one more appeal to you; not in my own behalf, for I care not now how soon death may overtake me, but for the sake of this dear motherless child, innocent of any wrong toward you.’

“And here again,” said Bob, “this ends abruptly.”

“If the handwriting of these scraps,” said Mr. Stanton, “were to be compared with that known to be

Edmund Dugdale's, it would be strong proof indeed. You have some in your possession, I believe, Hetlow."

Bob with this looked up keenly at Mr. Hetlow and, as Dick thought, with a frightened expression on his face, but only for an instant.

"I have such letters," replied Mr. Hetlow, looking at one of the scraps, "and, as I recollect the writing, this seems to be the same."

"Now to close," continued Bob.

"I have Mr. Pierson's statement that he received me from the hands of James Powers and his wife, both dead I understand, who said that I was the child of a lodger who had died in his house, named Dugdale. When I have added that, on Saturday last, a man named Ransom came to me offering, for a consideration, to take me to a man who could give me certain facts, which I saw at once would substantiate Mr. Pierson's statement, I have submitted all the proof at present in my possession."

All were silent for some time. Finally Mr. Hetlow said :

"It seems to me to be conclusive."

"No," remarked Mr. Stanton, "it is not conclusive. It is not weak, however, and is capable of being turned into strong proof."

"Well, be it strong or weak," said Bob, with a half laugh, as he gathered the papers together and made them into a little package, "it is all I have, though Mr. Pierson says he is certain there were other papers, but he has failed to find them as yet."

Then turning to Mr Hetlow, he said :

"Shall I leave them with you ?"

As he asked this question Dick, closely observant, thought he perceived an eagerness, almost anxiety, for the answer.

"No, no," quickly responded Mr. Hetlow, "they are far too important to you to permit them to go out of your hands. I thank you for the opportunity of permitting me to see them."

Again Dick was certain he saw an expression of relief flit over Harold Pierson's face at this answer, but he said :

"I should not have feared to trust them to the keeping of Mr. Hetlow."

Then he added quickly, as he bowed courteously to Mr. Hetlow :

"If you will permit me, I will withdraw and seek the ladies. You will of course wish to discuss these papers."

He was gone before a protest could be uttered.

"Well," said Mr. Hetlow, as the door closed on Bob, to Mr. Stanton, "what do you think of this?"

"I don't know," promptly answered the lawyer. "I want time to think it over. It looks right; indeed it looks strong. On the face of it, I would say there was a reasonable presumption, amounting to a moral conviction, that Harold Pierson is young Dugdale."

"I should think so," said Mr. Hetlow, in a tone of profound confidence.

"But it is not yet legal proof. However, I do not understand that he puts it before us as such. There have been such things as doctored documents—forged papers."

"Oh," said the merchant, "it is the habit, if not the practice, of you lawyers to be suspicious over everything."

"Not a bad failing," replied Mr. Stanton coolly. "The habit has prevented the consummation of many a fraud. Now, Hetlow, don't jump to a conclusion so hastily. It is not yet time to give up Bessie's claims. If you will take my advice, you will stop right here. File your claim, so as to preserve your status, in any proceedings that may be brought on behalf of this young man, and force him into action. Let it be dealt with in England. Stop where you are. You have done your whole duty. Let him do the fighting."

"Do you mean to say that you are not convinced?" Mr. Hetlow asked indignantly.

"If I had not heard what Mason learned on Monday, perhaps I might have been," calmly replied the lawyer. "Notwithstanding Pierson's explanation of it, I am not yet satisfied, and still distrust. You must stand upon your rights, defending them until the last."

The three rose and went to the drawing-room, where they found Wallis and Bessie at the piano in the music-room, and Harold Pierson engaged in conversation with Mrs. Stanton.

At once Dick noticed that Mrs. Stanton's face was flushed and that she seemed to be the prey to strong emotions, and that Bob looked troubled and anxious.

Bob indeed had reason to be troubled. He had obtained a fact from Mrs. Stanton which almost threw him into a panic.

Mrs. Stanton, in pursuing her delusion that her husband was unfaithful, had persuaded herself that Mason's frequent visits were solely due to an effort to shield her husband. She had therefore conceived a great dislike for him. And because she had frequently heard Dick express his distrust of Harold Pierson, she had perversely taken a fancy to the young claimant. By an illogical process of reasoning she had come to believe that, in the endeavor to shield her husband, the three—Dick, Mr. Hetlow, and Mr. Stanton—were sacrificing Harold Pierson and were engaged in an intrigue to deprive him of his inheritance. Having reached this conclusion, it was an easy step to the other, that her interests were bound up with those of Harold, and thus was to be explained why she had, in opposition to all about her, advocated Harold's claim.

When therefore the opportunity presented itself she opened her conversation with Harold Pierson, by offering him her friendship and sympathy. As a matter of course, Bob only too warmly accepted it.

He felt that Mr. Hetlow was inclined to accept him for what he represented himself to be; that Wallis and Bessie regarded him with an indifference that was almost void of interest, a fact which puzzled him so far as Bessie was concerned, since she had so much to lose by his success, and that Mr. Stanton and Dick looked upon him with distrust and suspicion. Therefore to have one of the group, even if her influence upon the situation must be slight, his friend was an opportunity not to be lost.

Finding that her proffer of friendship was eagerly accepted Mrs. Stanton proceeded to confidences. She related her reason for belief in her husband's infidelity, dilating upon her dreams and the cards which had confirmed her belief, and closing with the statement that she was a miserable and wronged woman. Bob thought at first Mrs. Stanton was not altogether sound in her mind, although he listened attentively and respectfully. When, however, she passed on to her description of the way Mason had conspired with her husband, drawing in Mr. Hetlow, to cloak his wrong-doings, under the specious device of a search for the Dugdale heir, he began to believe that there was some purpose in what she was saying. When the blonde woman in a red shawl made her appearance, and he began to realize that a factor in his conspiracy was presented, he was no longer indolently interested, but somewhat alarmed, for it was an element not considered or known in their intrigue. But when the event of the afternoon was recited, and the blonde woman in a red shawl was discovered to be a daughter of James Powers, that she had brought a tin box, in which was the evidence of the adoption of Dugdale's child and of the person to whom it was given, but which Mrs. Stanton firmly believed contained the evidence of her husband's moral turpitude, Bob was panicstricken, and his first impulse was to fly from the house and put himself in a place of safety.

Mrs. Stanton had told this with a great deal of heat and excitement. For the first time since she had entertained the idea of her husband's unfaithfulness, she had found someone who apparently believed her story. Having submitted her facts, Mrs. Stanton proceeded to an argument sustaining her belief. And while she talked Bob was thinking deeply. Learning that this box was still in her possession, and had not been seen by either Dick or Mr. Stanton, he grew more composed and could think more calmly. He appreciated the danger to its fullest extent. Should this box reveal the facts—the truth—not only would the enterprise they had engaged upon fail, but the four of them would be liable to arrest and prosecution. The situation was critical and called for prompt action. But what action? He had neither time nor opportunity to consult. What was to be done must be done at once. With more vigorous mental action than any of his associates would have credited him with, he formulated his plan and proceeded to carry it out.

"You are evidently entirely right," he said. "The proof against your husband is strong, and the contents of that box undoubtedly complete it overwhelmingly. You must see that neither Mr. Stanton, Mr. Mason, nor Mr. Hetlow, are permitted to see the contents of that box, or they will seize the papers and make away with them, when you will have lost your opportunity to confound your husband. Of course you know my position. I think, myself, that they are not disposed to yield me my right in this matter of the succession to the Dugdale estates. Your husband, only this evening, intimated to me that my proofs were not strong legally. You and I are involved in the one thing by being made the victims of a conspiracy.

"That is what I said at once," interrupted Mrs. Stanton.

"It is very clear," continued Bob eagerly. "They desire to shield Mr. Stanton. He means to face his deceit out with you. Mr. Hetlow naturally does not want me to prove my identity, while Mason is in love with Miss Hetlow and does not want the property to pass away from her. They make common cause together, and the result is that we are the victims. It is, therefore, necessary for us to join hands in defense of our respective rights. There may be papers in that box that will throw light upon my case."

"That is why I tell you," exclaimed Mrs. Stanton.

"Then keep that box secure until you can let me have it. When I can take it I will give it to my lawyer, who will be able to understand the papers better than you or I can."

Mrs. Stanton, however, shrank from this proposition, but Bob continued to skillfully play upon her delusion, until she finally yielded and promised to deliver it to him in some way.

"I do not see how I can give it to you unobserved," she said.

"It will never do for you to hand it to me," replied Bob. "If that were seen suspicion would be excited at once."

"But how can you get it?" she asked.

"It must be stolen from you," said Bob, after some reflection, "so that there will be no responsibility resting upon you."

"But how?" she inquired eagerly.

"Can you not place it where it can be taken to-night?" he asked.

To the desire, ardent and real if mistaken, to obtain proof of her husband's infidelity, was now added all the fascination of the mystery and the intrigue she had entered upon. She thought awhile and then said:

"I have concealed the box among a number of

others, into which my husband does not look in these days. I could not tell you how you would know it."

"But can you not put it in a place where it could be easily got?" urged Bob.

The foolish woman thought awhile and then said:

"I will place it on the table next to the window of the library which looks out upon the veranda, which is on the river side of the house. You can raise the window, which I will leave unfastened, and take it from the table."

"But which room is the library?" asked Bob. "You know I have never been in your house."

"It is the room on the river side of the house on the corner nearest Mr. Hetlow's house."

"That will do well. Leave it all to me."

It was at this point that the three who had been consulting in the library appeared, putting an end to further conversation between Mrs. Stanton and Bob.

Immediately thereafter the Springhill people took their leave. Somewhat to their astonishment Bob asked to be permitted to walk with them, saying that he would return at once. There was no opposition, as there could not be; and Bob walked with Dick and Wallis.

They had hardly reached the confines of the Hetlow grounds, when Bob suddenly exclaimed, "What a lovely night! and immediately his voice, in pure strong baritone, rolled out with the air of "Oh, lovely night!" He sang but a stave or two, when he began to talk rapidly as to the pleasure he took in country life and the joy he would experience could he live in such a place.

As the party reached the fence which surrounded the grounds in which Mr. Stanton's house was, he bade them good-night and abruptly left, going back over the path they had come.

His purpose in his sudden outburst of song was made apparent when he approached the Hetlow

grounds. Ransom rose up out of the ground apparently.

"I heard you sing, and took it for a call for me," he said.

"You're right. The devil is to pay," replied Bob. "Listen close and don't talk, for I must get back before suspicion is aroused."

Then, briefly, he told Ransom what he had learned from Mrs. Stanton as to the tin box, and the arrangement he had made to secure it.

Ranson was as badly frightened as Bob had been.

"But will she stick?" he asked.

"It was the best I could do," replied Bob. "We must take the chance. You must get the box to-night."

"I'll get it if it is there to get," said Ransom.

"We must, or we are done," said Bob, "and let me know if you've got it, for if you haven't I must see the old woman again."

"If a man, no matter who, stands before you to-morrow morning, the first time you show your head out of doors, and tears a large piece of paper up and throws the pieces into the air, that means I've got it."

Ransom slunk away into the darkness, and Bob went back into the house of "The Larches."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BURGLARY.

ON returning to Springhill Mr. Stanton, to his wife's infinite distress, led Dick into the library. As Wallis immediately retired to her own room the poor woman was given an opportunity to think over the enterprise she had engaged upon, alone.

"Mason," said Mr. Stanton, as he closed the door after them, "in looking over some of my old papers with a view of destroying those of no value, I came across some papers belonging to the estate of Thomas Mason—your uncle. I cannot tell how they got among my private papers, I suppose they did when I was settling it. I recently had my boxes removed from the office to this place. There they are, ten of them," pointing to a shelf, on which a number of tin boxes were ranged together. "I am weeding out the unimportant papers. I don't think they are of any value—I mean those belonging to the Mason estate—but you should look at them."

With this he rose from his chair and, going to the shelf, took down one of the boxes, bringing it to the table. On opening it, however, he said :

"This is not the one. Someone has been interfering with these boxes. The girls have had a dusting fit, I suppose, and upset things."

He took down another and indeed others, until he had six upon the table, without finding the one he was looking for, until at last he took down one to find it was locked.

"This is locked," he said, in surprise. "Which one is this? I don't remember it."

It was in fact the Jenkins box, which Mrs. Stanton thought she had so safely hidden. There would have been much trembling among certain people if they could have known that, at that moment, Mr. Stanton and Dick had the means within their own hands of definitely determining who was the real Dugdale heir.

But saying that it was not the one he was looking for, he took down another. Thus he had seven boxes on the table, and the seventh proved to be the one he wanted.

He handed the papers to Dick, who saw by the most cursory examination that they were of no value whatever.

"I will destroy them," he said.

"Put them back in the box," said Mr. Stanton, "and when I come to them in my weeding-out process I will get rid of them."

He lifted the box, as Dick did as he was bid, with the view of putting the box back, but Dick promptly interfered, and taking the box from his hand said:

"Sit down. I will put the boxes back."

He had restored two to their places, when Mr. Stanton, going over to the shelf, took down the Jenkins box and, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, tried to find a key that would unlock it.

"Strange," he muttered. "I have no key that fits it. I can't imagine what box this is."

While he was thus engaged Dick had put back three more. Mr. Stanton laid the box down on the table and Dick picked it up to replace it.

"Leave the others," said Mr. Stanton.

Misunderstanding his remark, Dick laid the box down again on a part of the table remote from the others.

The two talked a little while longer and then went to bed, leaving the three boxes on the table.

In the meantime Mrs. Stanton, having had ample time to reflect, began to shrink from the dishonorable

intrigue into which she had been led by Harold Pierson. And the more she pondered upon the scheme the more detestable it appeared to her. Finally, with a firm determination, she resolved to go no further in the matter. Could she have communicated with Harold Pierson she would have done so, but the hour was too late and so she went to bed, proposing to let Bob find out that she had retired from the scheme by finding that the window had not been prepared for him as she had promised, and expecting to explain to him, upon the first opportunity, her reasons for abandoning the scheme, even though it promised to give her proofs of her husband's infidelity.

There were occurrences during the night, however, which threw her plans into confusion. Early the next morning she was awakened from her sleep by excited poundings on the door. She opened it to be informed that during the night the house had been broken into.

With a consciousness of guilt and trembling with excitement, she hastily threw on a dressing-robe and descended the stairs. She knew that the event was the outcome of her talk with Harold Pierson, and though she had not been told that it was in the library that the attempt had been made, she went directly to that apartment. The window was open, the shutters thrown back, and the cool morning air was pouring through the room. On the table she saw the Jenkins box. With a devout sense of thankfulness she recognized it and, hardly knowing why, she hastily caught it up and placed it in an unused drawer, drawing some papers over it. She had barely accomplished this when Mr. Stanton entered the room.

He was too intent upon the burglary to notice his wife's agitation, and if he had, he would probably have attributed it to the event itself. He went over to the window and discovered that the shutters had been

pried off. Drawing down the sash he saw a hole had been cut through one of the panes by which an arm could be thrust through and the catch slipped back.

"It is burglary, sure enough!" he exclaimed.
"What has been stolen?"

Aroused by the confusion in the house Dick and Wallis came from their rooms, hastily dressed. A systematic search was entered upon. Then they began to wonder. Not an article was missing. The plate was in its place in the dining-room; the safe in the library had not been tampered with; and opening it, its contents were found to be secure. There was no indication that the burglar had gone beyond the library. They were stupefied—all but Mrs. Stanton who, if she were minded, could have explained. But she maintained a guilty silence. They gathered in the library again after the examination of the house.

"A most singular burglary," said Mr. Stanton, "I do not understand it. Not a single article taken."

Dick was looking at the table.

"Has anything been removed from this room since the discovery that the house had been entered was made?" he asked suddenly.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Stanton promptly.

"Then," said Dick, "the boxes left on the table last night were stolen."

Mr. Stanton counted the boxes on the shelf. There were eight of them.

"True," he said. "Two of them are missing."

Mrs. Stanton was conscience-stricken, but silent. This then was what her foolish conduct had resulted in. Two boxes containing her husband's private papers had been taken away. Of course it was a mistake—Harold Pierson did not want those. The box he did want was within his reach, but he had missed it. She determined that she would compel him to return them.

In the meantime the others were speculating as to what was the meaning of the desire to take these boxes.

"I presume," said Mr. Stanton at length, "some evil fellows were lurking about when we were handling these boxes last night, Mason, and saw us. Supposing them to contain valuables, they have broken into the house to get them. Well, they will make nothing by it. The sole result will be to incommod me."

Having reached this result, they separated to prepare for breakfast.

With the breakfast hour came the mail. There was a letter for Dick, from which as he opened it dropped a small key. The letter was from Mrs. Jenkins and informed him that she had forgotten to give the key of the tin box, which she had left with Mrs. Stanton, to the lady, a fact she discovered on arriving in New York, and had therefore mailed it to him.

Dick, much surprised, looked up from his letter and addressed Mrs. Stanton :

"Was Mrs. Jenkins here yesterday?"

The suddenness of the question, which seemed to reveal her wrong-doing, utterly confounded the lady. Her face flushed, and she trembled visibly.

Wallis, whose attention was caught by the question Dick had put, was astonished at the demeanor of her aunt, who after several efforts finally stammered out :

"Why, yes—yesterday afternoon. I forgot to tell you about it."

"Did she leave a box, of which this is the key, with you?"

He held up the key for her to look at.

By a violent effort Mrs. Stanton took possession of herself, realizing that the fact of Mrs. Jenkins' visit and her delivery of the box was now known, and, as well, that she was in a most unpleasant predicament.

"Yes," she replied, as promptly as she could. "She did leave a box and I put it on the library table, forgetting all about it."

She was not reassured by finding Wallis's dark eyes bent upon her keenly, and, she thought, suspiciously.

Dick leaped to a sudden conclusion, that took such fast hold of him that he failed to notice Mrs. Stanton's singularity of manner.

"Do you take this in, sir?" he asked, addressing Mr. Stanton, who had been apparently engrossed in his own thoughts.

Mr. Stanton looked upon Dick inquiringly.

"I fancy we have an explanation of the burglary of last night," continued Dick, unmindful of the perceptible start of Mrs. Stanton, which however was carefully noted by Wallis. "It seems that Mrs. Jenkins came here with that tin box she promised to bring and left it with Mrs. Stanton, who says she received it and, carrying it to the library, placed it on the table."

Mr. Stanton was aroused. He addressed his wife sternly:

"What! You forgot to mention it? That was exceedingly thoughtless—indeed it was reprehensible—so important a matter as that."

Mrs. Stanton quailed before the harsh and stern looks of her husband.

"Mrs. Jenkins came in just after you and Mr. Mason had gone into the village," replied Mrs. Stanton in an endeavor to defend herself.

"Where were you, Wallis, that you should have forgotten it too?" asked Mr. Stanton of his niece.

"I knew nothing of any box until now," returned Wallis. "When you drove off with Mr. Mason, I went over to see Bessie."

"Mason," said the old lawyer, turning to Dick, who began to regret he had been so precipitate, since

he had brought reproof on Mrs. Stanton, "Mason, that box I found locked must have been the one. But it was on the shelf."

"I left it on the table," said Mrs. Stanton, very red of face.

"It certainly was on the shelf when I saw it first," continued Mr. Stanton. "I think, wife, you must have put it there, without being conscious of your act. But, Mason, why do you say it explains the burglary?"

"That was a sudden and thoughtless conclusion," replied Dick. "When I'm called upon for argument to sustain it, I find myself in difficulty. But here are several facts. A burglary was committed. The house-maid, under your questioning, distinctly recollects closing the shutters and fastening the sashes last night. This morning the windows show a burglarious entrance. A searching examination of the house shows no purpose of robbing generally, since articles of value, easy of reach, were not touched. Hence we may conclude that behind the entrance was a specific purpose. But, what? That question brings me to my conclusion. If you will recollect though you took down eight boxes, five were replaced and three left on the table. These three boxes have disappeared. And these boxes were the specific purpose of the burglary."

"There were ten of my boxes on the shelf. This one brought by Mrs. Jenkins would make eleven," interrupted Mr. Stanton, as he hurried out of the room. He was back again in a moment.

"There are but eight left," he said, as he returned. "So three were taken."

"Now, sir," continued Dick, "let us assume for the sake of my argument, that there is a relation between the disappearance of the locked box brought by Mrs. Jenkins, which is among the three, and the claim of Harold Pierson to the Dugdale estate."

Both Mr. Stanton and Wallis were startled by the boldness of the proposition. Mrs. Stanton, however, very red of face and in an alarmed tone, cried out :

“ I do not know why you should do that.”

Her husband and her niece, surprised at her tone and manner, looked at her keenly and curiously.

“ Merely as a starting-point, Mrs. Stanton,” said Dick, bowing deferentially to her, and continued : “ There are certain facts of which we have been cognizant since the beginning of our search. When I called on Mrs. Tomlinson I learned that a middle-aged man had seen her upon precisely the same errand, before I got to her, while if he did not represent his name to be Mason, he at least left her under the impression that he was the Mason upon whose behalf Barber had seen her the previous day. Again, when we employ detectives to trace Powers, we are informed that they were preceded in every place they went by a man making precisely the same inquiries. The description of this man coincides with the description of the man calling upon Mrs. Tomlinson.”

“ I recollect,” interjected Mr. Stanton.

“ There must have been a purpose in all this,” Dick went on, “ and the purpose must have been to reach the end we were seeking. Now, grant me a single supposition. Suppose that having learned of the existence of a daughter of James Powers, as we did, and that there was in her possession a tin box, the contents of which might reveal the truth as to the adoption of Edmund Dugdale’s child, as we did, is it a violent assumption that this person, tracing the box to this house, adopted the felonious means of burglary to secure its possession ? ”

“ It is all nonsense,” suddenly ejaculated Mrs. Stanton.

“ Why, auntie ! ” cried Wallis, and not without purpose, “ what do you know of it ? ”

Mrs. Stanton was brought to a recognition of her own heat by the question. She replied hastily :

“I know nothing, but the argument is absurd.”

“Not by any means,” interposed Mr. Stanton. “It is very strong and plausible, and it only misses being conclusive.”

“I have not finished,” said Dick. “I connect Harold Pierson with this matter, by a slight and perhaps weak thread. Notwithstanding the apparent frankness of his explanation as to being found in the company of Ransom, I am not satisfied and I cannot divest myself of the idea that, though he pretended to the contrary, Ransom was, in fact, in collusion with Harold and Orton Pierson before he came to me in answer to my advertisement. Then there is the further fact that I am almost certain that prior to last Monday, I have twice seen Ransom about these grounds. If I cannot present a conclusive argument,” he concluded with a laugh, “I can build a very complete theory.”

“So complete a theory,” said Mr. Stanton, in a tone which showed how greatly impressed he was by Dick’s talk, “that it demands thorough investigation, until the theory is confirmed or destroyed.”

“I am glad you have reached such a conclusion,” said Dick almost gratefully. “I will present these facts to Captain Lawton to-day.”

“Not until we have first consulted Mr. Hetlow,” said Stanton.

Thus it was that immediately after breakfast the two sought Mr. Hetlow. They found Harold Pierson preparing to depart in high spirits. A man had appeared before him throwing bits of paper into the air.

Mr. Hetlow listened attentively. He discussed Dick’s theory as more ingenious than probable, but on Mr. Stanton’s urgency he gave a reluctant consent that the facts should be presented to Captain Lawton.

Dick could not avoid traveling to the city in the company of Harold Pierson, though he tried not to do so. Bob had known of the brief conference between Mr. Hetlow and Mr. Stanton and Dick, without knowing its subject, but he surmised it had relation to the box. He was therefore persistent in clinging to Dick in the hope that he might elicit something.

At first Dick avoided mention of the theft of the boxes, but the idea occurred to him that he might surprise Harold Pierson into some indication of a knowledge of it.

"Springhill was entered by burglars last night," he said abruptly,

"By burglars?" repeated Bob incredulously.

"The house was broken into, the shutters being pried open and the glass cut, and certain tin boxes, containing papers, stolen," he added.

Bob was now sincerely astonished. His face showed it. It was genuine and unmistakable; this was not according to the programme. He thought that Mrs. Stanton had failed and that Ransom, finding that the window was not prepared as promised, had entered by force and carried off all the boxes he could find. Dick was misled. He thought Harold Pierson had no acquaintance with the act. He wondered if the young man could be the dupe of other men, for he had great faith in his theory.

"Were these boxes of value—that is, their contents?" asked Bob innocently.

"Two of them were of no value at all. The third only reached the house yesterday, and contained matters which might have gone to the proof of the heirship to the Dugdale estates," said Dick, upon sudden impulse to test Bob.

It failed, however, for Bob was busy with another thought.

"The old woman has squealed," he thought, "but Ransom has got the box."

As the two parted at the station in the city, Bob said with a laugh:

"I leave 'The Larches' this morning without an invitation to return."

Dick thought that Mr. Hetlow was becoming suspicious. Aloud he said:

"A relative of the family does not need an invitation to visit at will."

The sneer accompanying these words was so evident that Bob did not fail to notice it and marked it for further thought.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PUZZLED CONSPIRATORS.

DICK immediately called upon Captain Lawton. No sooner had he entered his office than that official called out:

"Ah! I have just sent to your office. I have some information. Ransom is a man without visible means of support, yet seems to be always in funds. He is a sporting man. Nothing is known to his discredit save that he seems to have an extensive acquaintance with crooked people. For six months a young man named Bob Brown has been his constant companion. Beyond this companionship nothing is reported against him. Just about the time that Orton Pierson's son Harold made his appearance in Harlem after a long absence, this young man disappeared from the haunts of Ransom and his companionship. The description of one may be taken for the description of the other. There is a point for you to consider. I have learned that Ransom and Orton Pierson have been long acquainted, and many years ago were closely connected. A lawyer of rather shady reputation, named Moore, meets with the three I have named, at Orton Pierson's house in 128th Street, nearly daily. I know this man."

"All of this supports my theory," said Dick musingly.

"Your theory?" inquired the captain.

"Yes, my theory," replied Dick; "but before I tell it, please describe this man Moore."

The captain did so minutely.

"It is the same," exclaimed Dick excitedly. "He

is the man who visited Mrs. Tomlinson and afterward pushed his inquiry in Newark for knowledge of James Powers. This is growing warm."

He then related to the captain the story of the burglary on Mr. Stanton's house the previous night, and afterward explained his theory. The captain listened attentively. When Dick had concluded his story he said:

"Then your belief is that the scheme is a fraudulent attempt to palm off the adopted son of the elder Pierson as young Dugdale."

"Yes; either with or without the knowledge and consent of Harold Pierson."

"With his knowledge," exclaimed the captain. "I do not believe that Harold Pierson is the adopted son of Orton. He is Bob Brown in my opinion. It is a deep plot, which must be closely looked into. Your theory is excellent and I will work on its lines."

While this conference was going forward in Captain Lawton's office, another was in progress at Orton Pierson's house, in an upper room.

Ransom had arrived early in the morning and was awaiting Bob's appearance impatiently. He had told the story of the previous night's experience to Moore and Orton Pierson. Both were well frightened. They were not at all reassured by Ransom's emphatic statement that Bob was convinced that no one but Mrs. Stanton had knowledge of the box. Moore had urged that the Hetlow people knew the woman Jenkins and could obtain knowledge of its contents from her. When Bob appeared he was eagerly plied with questions.

"You are all off the track," he said. "The story is serious enough, I can tell you, without making it more so. Mrs. Stanton says, and I believe her, that no one knew that the box had been received at the Stanton house but herself. She is a jealous old fool, and believes the box contains evidence by which she can

convict her husband of some intrigue she thinks he has been engaged in. She says the box belonged to James Powers and that his daughter—the Jenkins woman—does not understand the papers in it. So far as that goes it is all right. Ransom," he said, suddenly breaking off and turning to that person, "how many boxes did you get?"

"Two."

"Holy smoke! Three were taken, or were missing this morning."

The two stared at each other in blank amazement. The others looked upon them with frightened interest.

"I took two," at length said Ransom. "All I saw. When I reached the window I found it tighter than a drum and I thought, if the old woman hadn't weakened at the end, she had forgotten the window in her flurry. So I went in anyhow. When I got in, there were two boxes on the table, and I took them both to make sure, and made off."

"Well," said Bob, after a moment's reflection, "I'm afraid the old woman has squealed, and not any further than to tell about the box. I came down on the cars with Mason. He said three boxes had been taken, two containing private papers of Mr. Stanton and one papers going to the proof of the heirship to the Dugdale estates—what the proof was he did not know. Now you see that though Mrs. Stanton told me last night that no one but herself knew the box had been received, yet this morning Mason knew it. She must have squealed."

"Perhaps," said Moore, "they came to know that this Jenkins woman had been there and she was compelled to admit the box."

"But about the three boxes?" said Ransom. "I got but two."

"We must examine those boxes at once," said Orton Pierson. "We are getting into shallow waters and must be cautious in every movement we make."

Ransom produced a large paper box from which he took the tin ones he had stolen the night previous. In the first there were nothing but the private papers of Mr. Stanton relating to transactions long since closed and of no significance. The other was filled with receipted bills, many of them of ancient date.

The conspirators were dumfounded. The box, to secure which a burglary had been committed, had not been obtained. They were in great danger—as great as when Dick first learned of its existence. Worse, indeed, for now burglary had been added to complicate the situation.

They stood blankly looking at each other. Ransom broke the silence by cursing the woman who had misled them.

"We are in great danger," said Moore.

"And because we don't know where the box is and what is in it," added Orton Pierson.

"Because we don't know what they know," growled Ransom.

"You all forget that Mason says that three were taken," suggested Bob.

"I'll swear I took but two," protested Ransom—"all there was there."

"Well," said Bob thoughtfully, "this is the point. Mason says three boxes are missing. Ransom says there were only two there—these are the ones. It seems to me that Mrs. Stanton either weakened or something interfered to prevent her carrying out her agreement with me. She may have that box concealed and is giving it out that it went with the rest. They knew the box, for Mason spoke of it. If she has got it she will keep it concealed."

"But you don't know," insisted Ransom, "and our hands are tied until you do."

"Here is my point," continued Bob, "this Mrs. Jenkins lives in Philadelphia. Let Moore go and find her out. It ought not to be much of a hunt and

perhaps he can learn what is in the box from her, though Mrs. Stanton says she doesn't know. Anyhow he may get at something to show us how to go."

"That's a good suggestion," said Orton Pierson. "I see no other course."

"I'll set out this very afternoon," said Moore, "and I'll learn enough to know whether we are to go on or take to the woods."

"What are we going to do with these bloody boxes?" asked Ransom.

"Send them back again by express," said Moore.

Ransom laughed incredulously.

"I mean it," said Moore. "It will take any personal reason out of this affair, Stanton may have for pursuing seriously the discovery of who committed the burglary."

"It is a good idea," acquiesced Orton Pierson.

"Very well," said Ransom, "they will go back. But isn't this Mason piling things up pretty strong? He is the one who is doing the fighting."

"Yes," said Bob, "he is the one, d—— him."

Ransom looked at the others significantly, but said nothing. Neither did the others.

Moore broke the silence by saying to Bob:

"Bob, you ought to get into communication with that woman Stanton."

"How can I until we know the ground we stand on?" asked Bob. "It would be dangerous to go there now. And besides I have no excuse."

"She may have squealed on the whole affair," said Ransom.

"I don't think she has," said Orton Pierson. "If she had the box wouldn't be missing. It isn't likely that anybody else went into that house that night. If it is missing, it is because she has got it in hiding. We can't tell that, nor can we know, until she has been seen."

Ransom, looking to Bob, said:

"I can take you up there so you won't be seen. We can lay quiet for a chance to meet her, or to see her somehow."

Bob shook his head.

"There is no risk in going up there," urged Ransom.

"See here, Bob," put in Moore, "the more I think of it the clearer it is to me, that you ought to do as Ransom says. If Mrs. Stanton made that arrangement with you, she knows what that burglary, as they call it, meant. If she has squealed at all, she would have given you away before you left Hetlow's house. The fact that you were permitted to leave is proof to me that she hasn't. There is something in her failure to carry out the scheme with you, and in the box being missing, that we don't understand."

"By George! that is so," exclaimed Bob, caught by the argument.

"Well then, you do what Ransom says. Go up there under cover and I will go to Philadelphia to-night. We were all ready for the next move but everything must stop now until we know the grounds we are on."

Bob yielded, and the worthies fell to making plans as to the course to be pursued in reaching Mrs. Stanton. Orton Pierson was called out of the room. He returned shortly, much alarmed, exclaiming:

"Mason went straight from the station to the police headquarters."

"Well," said Ransom, "that ought not to frighten you. It was the famous burglary that sent him there."

"Ah, but if that were all," returned Pierson. "The last place he visited before he left town was police headquarters."

"D—— Mason!" cried Ransom. "He is getting too fresh. He must be stopped. Bob, meet me at the old place to-night, at eight o'clock, togged up. I'm off."

And thus the conference ended.

CHAPTER XXV.

COMPLICATIONS.

DICK'S startling theory, by which he connected the burglary at Springhill with the pretensions of Harold Pierson to the Dugdale estates, had caused the possibility of what the contents of the tin box might have revealed to be lost sight of.

It was Mr. Stanton who first recalled what might be lost in this theft of the box. Accordingly he wrote to Dick urging that steps be taken, if not to recover the box, which of course would be more desirable but naturally more difficult, to at least endeavor to ascertain what the contents consisted of. He suggested, as the only means he could think of, that Dick should go to Philadelphia to see Mrs. Jenkins.

Dick had just returned from a visit to Captain Lawton when he received this letter from Mr. Stanton. The detective had said that Bob, on parting with Dick on the day previous, had gone straightway to Orton Pierson's house, where Ransom and Moore were awaiting him, and to which place Ransom had gone early in the morning carrying a large bundle. The detective further told Dick that, after a long stay, the three, Ransom, Moore, and Bob, had left at different times, and gone in different directions; that trace had been lost of Ransom and Bob, but that the officer following Moore had tracked him to the Pennsylvania railroad station and saw him buy a ticket for Philadelphia, when, having no instructions to leave the city, he had returned and made his report.

"That bundle carried by Ransom," said Dick eagerly, "contained the boxes stolen from Springhill."

"That is mere guessing," returned the captain.

"True," replied Dick, "it is guesswork, but I am certain that to examine the contents of those boxes was the meaning of the gathering that morning."

"When Ransom went away he carried the same bundle with him."

"And trace was lost of him," said Dick thoughtfully, "that is bad, for I fear the boxes have been made away with."

"I fear so," said the captain, showing no little chagrin. "It was very stupid of my men to let them slip, but I imagine that they disguised themselves, and my men were not looking for that."

"Well," said Dick, as he rose to take his departure, "the events of the day have justified to some extent my theory, and at all events give good reasons for proceeding upon the basis that Harold Pierson's claim is a fraudulent one."

"The matter will be pursued with all the skill and energy of which I am capable," said the captain, with considerable reserve in his manner.

Dick waited a moment or two for the captain to go on, hoping that he would indicate what methods he would employ in his farther inquiry, but as the detective did not seem disposed to gratify his desire, Dick bade him good-by and went away.

On reaching his office, he found Mr. Stanton's letter. Immediately on reading it he exclaimed aloud:

"That fellow Moore has gone to see Mrs. Jenkins."

He resolved to set out for Philadelphia at once. Assuring himself that he had barely time to catch the next train he hurried off.

While these events were occurring in New York, Mr. Stanton, at Springhill, was wondering over the receipt of a package containing the two boxes filled with his private papers which had been stolen on the previous Wednesday night. There was nothing to indicate from whence they had come. An examina-

tion revealed that none of the papers had been extracted.

"This goes to the proof," he said, thoughtfully to himself, "that the Jenkins box was the one the thieves were after, and that in their haste they took the three to make sure of the right one. They have returned these two because they were of no use to them. There is something in young Mason's theory after all."

He called his wife and Wallis to tell them the extraordinary occurrence. Mrs. Stanton was much agitated when she saw the two stolen boxes returned, for knowing that they were the only ones taken, she feared that their return was preliminary to either a confession or a revelation on the part of Harold Pier-
son, which would expose her own guilty part in the intrigue in which she had become involved, and from which she had receded at the last moment, but which, nevertheless, had led to the burglary. She was on the point of confessing to her husband that the Jenkins box had not been taken with the others, but was hidden by her on the morning after the burglary. She was restrained, however, by the fear of her husband's anger and of the humiliating position she would be placed in before Wallis and their neighbors of "The Larches."

"Mr. Mason was right," exclaimed Wallis, "in saying that it was the Jenkins box that was wanted."

"So I think," replied her uncle, "but I am puzzled to know how these boxes were sent back. They must have uncovered their tracks in returning them in some way. They were brought here by the expressman. I am going into the village to make inquiries. I ought to be able to learn from what place they were shipped and by whom."

He left them to carry out this intention. Wallis waited until her uncle was gone from the house, when she turned to her aunt and said most pointedly:

"The theft of that box is most unfortunate. If any-

one interested in our affairs is in any way responsible for it, such person can have the satisfaction of feeling that he may have contributed to Bessie's loss of her fortune."

Mrs. Stanton's face flushed deeply as she encountered Wallis's dark eyes bent keenly upon her. She was confused, and averted her head. Her manner troubled Wallis. From the beginning, her suspicions as to her aunt's relation to the matter had been aroused. It was difficult for her to believe that Mrs. Stanton had anything in common with those who had broken into the house. But, as a matter of fact, she did not believe that those who had done so were common burglars. She had given an implicit faith to Dick's theory, believing in it even more firmly than Dick himself. Therefore, influenced by him to suspect Harold Pierson, remembering her aunt's long and confidential conversation with that young man at Mr. Hetlow's house on the night of the burglary, the evident agitation of both, and, knowing Mrs. Stanton's absurd and unreasonable jealousy of Mrs. Jenkins, she had come to believe that in that conversation her aunt had told Harold Pierson that the box had been received that afternoon. She did not believe that her aunt had told this with any view of committing wrong, but she was influenced thereto by the fancy that the box did not contain anything relating to the Dugdale heirship, but to the imaginary child she insisted Mr. Stanton was hunting for. Her conclusion had been that her aunt having told of the box, Harold Pierson, becoming alarmed as to the effect its contents might have on him, had resolved upon the desperate means of securing it, by entering the house, having first obtained from her aunt knowledge as to its location, and that Mrs. Stanton, recognizing in the morning the meaning of the burglary, had maintained silence, hoping thereby to conceal the fact that she had in the first instance secreted it. The letter from Mrs. Jen-

kins to Dick, transmitting the key, had forced her to the admission of Mrs. Jenkins's visit, but the box then having disappeared, as the result of her indiscreet revelation to Harold Pierson, she was compelled to deny further knowledge of it than that she had placed it on the library table and forgotten it. In short, she thought her aunt was less guilty than indiscreet, and that the trouble which had followed was the outcome of her absurd jealousy which, up to that time, had been only amusing to Wallis.

Mrs. Stanton, recovering from the confusion into which she had been thrown by Wallis's barbed speech, replied:

"A great deal of unnecessary fuss is made about that box. Your uncle is annoyed only because he thinks he is prevented from finding that child. The woman in a red shawl is the mother of Mrs. Jenkins. I found that out. The affair is much further back than I thought it was."

"Pshaw," cried Wallis contemptuously, and much vexed, "one would suppose that with the trouble it has led to, you would give up that absurd notion."

She turned on her heel and walked away. She went out of the house, going in the direction of "The Larches," her purpose being to tell Bessie of the return of the boxes. As she walked along she tried to think of the course she ought to pursue with reference to her aunt's conduct. She was much perplexed, but her final conclusion was that, were she to tell her suspicions, it would be only to involve her aunt in trouble without leading to the restoration of the box. But there was this consideration. Were her suspicions correct, and having concealed the box, had her aunt informed Harold Pierson as to it and could she be forced to admit such to be the case, there would then be certain proof that Harold Pierson was intimately connected with the burglary. Her determination as she reached the house was that she would say nothing

to her uncle, or to anyone else except Dick. And, as soon as she could send him word, she would ask him to come to Springhill that she might consult him as to what should be done.

The fact that Mr. Stanton and Wallis had left the house and that Mrs. Stanton was alone, was immediately conveyed to Bob and Ransom, who were in hiding in the neighborhood. As soon as it was safe for Bob to make his appearance at Springhill he boldly entered. He was fortunate in finding Mrs. Stanton in the hall. She was surprised upon seeing him but nevertheless greeted him with an exclamation indicative of her satisfaction. Bob did not wait for her to ask any questions, but abruptly said:

"You did not keep your engagement of Wednesday night; nor have we had the box which you promised we could secure."

"It was not my fault," replied Mrs. Stanton. "The tin box was upon the same table as the ones you took were."

"You are mistaken as to my having taken them," replied Bob. "The person I sent found on his arrival that the window was not arranged so that he could lift it, and he was forced to break it open. I would not have permitted that had I known it, but when he did enter in this forcible manner, he found upon the table two boxes, the only ones that were there, and carried them off. As you must know they contained nothing of importance to us."

"They have been returned," said Mrs. Stanton. "Mr. Stanton has now gone to the village for the purpose of making inquiries as to where they came from."

"He will not find out," said Bob. "I know they were returned and I know the sending of them cannot be traced. However, it is not to talk about those boxes that I have come to you. I am here secretly, for I do not wish anyone to know I have seen you.

But I do want that box you promised I should secure, and I must have it."

This was said in so threatening a manner that Mrs. Stanton was not a little alarmed. From the moment Bob appeared she had, however, determined not to yield the box to him. Her fright had been too great over the events resulting from the discovery of the burglary of Thursday morning and the attitude of those about her. Although she persisted in her absurd delusion as to what the contents of this box would show, as incriminating her husband, still the conversation between Mr. Stanton and Dick, and the very pointed remarks only half an hour previous of Wallis, had somewhat shaken her in her belief.

Though frightened by Bob's determined manner, she had no mind to go further than she had already gone. Prudence, however, dictated to her to equivocate, and so, when Bob repeated his remark, she told him that it was impossible and that the box was no longer under her control.

"Then it has passed into the hands of that man Mason," exclaimed Bob, very much alarmed.

"No," Mrs. Stanton replied, "neither he, nor Mr. Stanton, nor indeed Mr. Hetlow, have the box nor will they have it. While it is not in my power to give it to you, you can rest assured that it is safe, where neither they nor anyone else will be able to obtain it."

Bob looked at her suspiciously and reflected a moment or two. Then he said as if a new idea had broken upon him:

"You did not intend then to arrange that window as you had agreed upon?"

"I had no opportunity," replied Mrs. Stanton. "Mr. Stanton and Mr. Mason on our return went immediately into the library, where they remained so long that I was compelled to abandon any attempt. Nevertheless, the man you sent to get the box having broken through the window could easily have obtained

it. It stood upon the table with the others. The next morning I was the first to enter the room after the alarm was given that the house had been entered, and, seeing the box, disposed of it before any of the others could see it. But in such a manner that I cannot get it for you."

"But Mason knew that Mrs. Jenkins had left it with you," rejoined Bob.

"That is true," replied Mrs. Stanton, "but it was purely by accident. When Mrs. Jenkins left the box with me she forgot to leave the key. Returning to New York, and discovering that she still had it, she inclosed the key in a letter to Mr. Mason, which informed him that she had left the box with me. I was therefore forced to admit that such was the case, but all rest under the belief that at the time the two boxes were taken the Jenkins box was also carried off. You are quite as secure from anything occurring to interfere with your matters as coming from that box, as if it were already in your hands. Mr. Stanton says that the contents might go to the proof of your claim, but I know better. I am certain Mr. Stanton's desire for that box is to destroy proof against himself."

At this moment a long low whistle sounded not far from the door. Upon hearing it Bob started and said hastily:

"Can I rely upon your assurance that that box will not go into the hands of anybody?"

"You can be sure that it will not go into the hands of anyone who can harm or interfere with you," replied Mrs. Stanton.

"I presume," said Bob, "that I must rest content with this. I cannot remain longer without being discovered. That whistle was a signal for me to depart. I shall rely upon your promise."

With this he walked out of the door opposite to that by which he had entered, descended to the lawn, and striding rapidly across it disappeared in the shrubbery

upon the other side, leaving Mrs. Stanton in much agitation, gratefully thankful that the ordeal she had so much dreaded when she saw Bob enter, had passed so quickly.

He had hardly passed out of sight when Mr. Stanton entered. He was too much engrossed in the business he had been upon to notice his wife's evident confusion, and said abruptly:

"I have not been able to ascertain a single fact concerning the shipment of that bundle. It came to the station addressed to me prepaid and the way-bill does not discover who the shipper was. The expressman who brought it here was the local man, directed to do so by the station agent. The more I consider this matter, the more convinced I am, that young Mason was correct in saying that a close relation exists between Harold Pierson's claim to be young Dugdale and the burglary of Wednesday night. You see," he went on, in an argumentative tone, "either young Pierson, or those acting for him, must have known of Mrs. Jenkins coming to this house, and that she carried with her a box, the contents of which related in some degree to the adoption of Edmund Dugdale's child. Now I am not quite prepared to go so far as young Mason does in assuming that it is proof positive that the claim of Pierson is necessarily thereby a fraudulent one. It is quite possible that he has been persuaded to believe, although Mr. Hetlow's treatment of him would not justify the conclusion, that if the contents of this box were to prove his claim they would be concealed from him by Mr. Hetlow and those acting for him, and that therefore he was justified in resorting to such desperate means to obtain possession of it."

"I don't see any reason why Mr. Mason should regard Mr. Pierson with such enmity," replied Mrs. Stanton, now quite composed, finding that her husband had not noticed traces of agitation in herself.

"I think Mr. Mason regrets very much his efforts in discovering the Dugdale heir. You know he is in love with Bessie and doubtless has received assurances from her that his love is returned, and that being the case, he is now regretting that the large amount of money which would fall to her, if the real heir was not found, is in danger of going elsewhere."

"Oh, nonsense," returned Mr. Stanton contemptuously, "young Mason is a very straightforward, well-meaning young man. I think it very probable that I am wholly responsible for Mason's condition of mind with reference to these suspicions of his."

"I have no doubt of that," replied Mrs. Stanton. "That has been my belief from the beginning."

Mr. Stanton, who had turned to go into the library, wheeled about and said sharply:

"Now, what do you mean by that? You certainly don't understand what I intended to say. Sometime ago I told Mason that in view of the fact that he was a suitor for the hand of Bessie, and that believing as he had said that the inheritance of such an estate would lift her into a rank of life beyond his pretensions he would be in danger of being charged with presenting a Dugdale heir whether the true one was found or not. Since that time I have noticed a morbid sensitiveness on his part, and a determined persistency in urging that Harold Pierson's claim should be most rigidly examined. He is quite right in this, for the search has been wholly under his charge and he is responsible for having presented Harold Pierson to the attention of Mr. Hetlow. That is all I mean, and I have no further connection with it than that, so don't give me another exhibition of your silliness."

With that he turned into the library, leaving Mrs. Stanton alone.

While these events were taking place at Springhill, Dick was in Philadelphia bent on his interview with Mrs. Jenkins. Having her address he found her

without difficulty. She was, of course, astonished to see her caller, and listening to his reasons she abruptly said:

"Why, Mr. Mason, a person was here last night to inquire as to the very same thing."

This did not surprise Dick, for when he left New York he was satisfied that Moore had preceded him. He asked Mrs. Jenkins for a description of the person who had called upon her the previous evening, and found it agreed with the description given by Mrs. Tomlinson as to the one who had called upon her in the very beginning of the search, and also with Captain Lawton's description of Moore.

"Well," he said anxiously, "did you give him all the information you could?"

"It was very little I could give him," she replied. "Though I looked over the papers I could not understand them. My husband, however, understood them better than I did, but he was not at home nor is he to-day. He has gone out of town for some days, so that the person really went away without anything being told him."

While this was satisfactory to Dick, so far as it showed that Moore's errand had been fruitless, it was not satisfactory as it evidenced that it would be impossible for him to obtain the information as to the contents of the box. He, however, questioned Mrs. Jenkins very closely, but all that he could elicit was that there were four letters which were evidently from the person who had adopted the child, and a paper which set forth the fact that the child had been adopted and had been received from Thomas Powers. Whether this paper was signed, or if signed, by what name, Mrs. Jenkins was wholly unable to state. Indeed she seemed to be in a somewhat muddled condition concerning it, and so at last Dick was compelled to forego further effort and departed.

After he left the house, however, the thought

occurred to him, that if the box contained the papers which Mrs. Jenkins said it did and if they revealed the truth as to the adoption of the child, it was strange that Moore should have taken the trouble to have visited Mrs. Jenkins in the quest of further information. So strong was his thought as indicating that either the papers did not reveal the whole truth, or that after all the box had not been secured by the conspirators, that he returned to Mrs. Jenkins to question her more particularly as to what had occurred between herself and Moore.

The second interview with her was somewhat more satisfactory. Mrs. Jenkins was quite certain that Moore had told her that Mr. Mason had learned that the box had been delivered, only to learn at the same time that it had been stolen, and that he had come in the endeavor to inform himself as to its contents, because, having been stolen, Mr. Mason had not been able to do so. This seemed to show to Dick that the conspirators were not themselves acquainted with the contents, but he could arrive at no conclusion which seemed probable as to why this should be, once having had it in their possession. He thought perhaps that in the hurry it had been lost, but as it was a mere matter of speculation he thought that he could indulge himself in a dozen different ways without arriving at anything definite. On the whole his expedition to Philadelphia only seemed to make the case more mysterious and more complicated. On his arrival in the city he hastened at once to Captain Lawton, who told him that no trace had been recovered as to Ransom or Bob, and that Moore had appeared at Orton Pierson's house quite early in the morning, and after a brief interview with Pierson had left, going about his ordinary pursuits. The detective told him that he had made comparatively little progress in establishing the theory he had accepted from Dick, and apprehended that it would be a work of considerable time to gather the informa-

tion necessary to direct action. He volunteered the statement, that so far as he had gone it was indicated that the four people under surveillance were all shady characters, and that he was making a very rigid examination into their past with the hope of connecting them with something that would justify him in coming into closer quarters with them, and which he could use as a lever to force one, or all of them, to confess the parts they were playing.

Dick went away from this interview much perplexed. It seemed to him that so far from light being shed upon the case it was growing darker and darker. All that seemed to him at all clear was that Harold Pierson was not young Dugdale, and yet, if something more definite than had yet been secured which would enable them to make the charge that a conspiracy existed was not obtained, and if Pierson continued to pile up proofs of his being a son of Edmund Dugdale, the property might pass into his hands before the theory concocted by him, and adopted by Captain Lawton, could be turned into fact.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BURST OF SUNSHINE.

As Wallis had promised herself, she wrote to Dick that she was anxious to see him on a most important matter. This letter Dick received at his room, after leaving Captain Lawton. Wallis seemed to be so urgent that he determined to go to her at once, and on alighting from the cars at the station at Dobbs Ferry, he found her awaiting him.

"I made a good guess," she said. "Uncle told me that he thought you had gone to Philadelphia last evening and that you would return to-day, so I sent my letter to your home address, rather than to the office, and I thought that, upon receiving it, you would come up in this train. I wanted to have the chance for a talk with you before we got home."

She then told Dick all that had occurred since he had left Springhill, and as well her suspicions as to her aunt's connection with the burglary.

It was difficult for Dick to believe that Mrs. Stanton had been led by her jealousy into such a complication. When he found that Wallis had nothing substantial upon which to base her suspicions he was at a loss as to what course to suggest, but the final conclusion between them was, to do nothing in the way of making any charge against Mrs. Stanton, but to watch carefully as to what relations she might have with Harold Pierson and to prevent any further intriguing between them. "To be sure," argued Dick, "all the damage she can do has been done. If your theory is correct the whole extent of the intrigue was the obtaining of that box. It was when she told him of it

that he, undoubtedly alarmed as to what its contents might be, determined to get possession of it, and he has made her a victim in the matter. Having obtained it of course he is through with Mrs. Stanton, but I am disposed to believe from what I heard in Philadelphia, that either the box did not reveal anything conclusive, or it has been lost before an examination could be made. I am led to believe that the sole purpose of Moore's visit to Philadelphia was to discover whether Mrs. Jenkins knew anything more than the box told."

"Auntie has been very silly," replied Wallis. "She has been misled by her absurd jealousy of uncle and has fallen into the trap which Harold Pierson laid for her. But I do not want to bring her into any trouble, and I would not tell it to uncle, fearing his anger. I had no one else to consult but you. I am glad you do not think it necessary to do anything more, but I think I will have a plain talk with auntie and tell her what my suspicions are."

"I do not believe that anything can be accomplished now in the way of restoration," said Dick, "but if she will talk to you, we may be satisfied as to just what her connection with Harold Pierson was. It would settle the question as to whether or not our suspicions of Harold Pierson are true."

"I will endeavor to make her tell," said Wallis, "and now let us drop the topic, while I tell you that Lord Merrimount has returned. He came quite unexpectedly this morning."

Dick was by no means pleased with this information. He had persuaded himself that the young Englishman would remain away a much longer time. He had hoped during his absence to arrive at an understanding with Bessie. He now realized, as he had not done before, that he was no farther advanced than he had been at the time of the young nobleman's departure. Indeed, he had seen Bessie but for a brief moment on the last night that Harold Pierson was at "The

Larches.'" The note which he had received from Bessie had still been unexplained and the attitude assumed by Mr. Hetlow toward himself, which, resulting in nothing overt, had, nevertheless, erected a barrier intangible yet actual. While he had been in a fairly contented frame of mind regarding Bessie's feeling toward himself, he had, by reason of the events so rapidly treading on each other's heels, permitted all other things to drift. Now, however, on learning that Lord Merrimount had returned, and so much sooner than was expected, he fell back into that condition of mind in which he had been, when he first believed that Merrimount's purpose in his visit to America was to sue for Bessie's hand.

The acute Wallis quickly perceived the anxious expression which had settled upon his face. So she said :

"Does my news give you alarm? Well, rest assured you are in no danger. I think that I can tell you, without betraying confidences, that no matter whether Bessie does or does not inherit the Dugdale estates, she will not accept Lord Merrimount."

"Since you have told me so much," said Dick. "I think you might relieve my suspense with regard to the other matter I have asked you."

"Oh, no," laughed Wallis, "I cannot tell you that. Bessie will not allow me to do so. I do not think it is because she does not want you to know, but because she wants to tell you it herself."

"You promised me an interview with her which you did not give me," said Dick.

"I promised you," repeated Wallis. "It was Bessie who promised you the interview. I merely carried the message, but I will be gracious. I will tell you of an inference I have drawn from a conversation with Bessie, and that is that whoever may come a-wooing to 'The Larches' there will be but one who will receive the favor of the daughter, no matter how he

may be regarded by the father, and that one is a very conceited and stupid gentleman of your intimate acquaintance."

"I presume," said Dick, "your loyalty to confidence will not permit you to tell who that very conceited and stupid gentleman is?"

"Oh, yes, and if he was not as stupid as I have said he was, he would have guessed immediately that I meant none other than Mr. Richard Mason."

"Wallis," said Dick, with somewhat of his old manner, "you know that I have a very great admiration for your acuteness, but if you would cultivate a little more directness of speech you would be a great deal more comforting."

"Well, then," said Wallis laughingly, "I will be direct and tell you that Bessie has left me in no doubt, though not intentionally, that her heart is solely given to yourself. It only remains for you to secure an interview with Bessie and assure yourself."

"But oh when, and oh where," cried Dick. "I have sedulously sought one ever since I received her mysterious note, but either she avoids, or her father very skillfully prevents one."

"Well," said Wallis, "I can easily relieve you as to that. This evening, as it has been arranged, Bessie and Lord Merrimount are coming over to Springhill and we are to go over the tunnel for a row on the river. Uncle and Mr. Hetlow propose to enact the part of American citizens this evening and go to a political meeting in the village. So as no one knows that you are coming to Springhill I do not know that it is necessary to send a telegraphic message to 'The Larches' of the fact of your arrival. There; there is your interview ready-made. I will be your good ally to-night, as I have been in the past, and help you to secure it."

This conversation brought them to the door of Springhill and was interrupted by the appearance of

Mr. Stanton, much surprised to see Dick, whom he imagined could hardly have returned from Philadelphia.

Anxious to learn the result of Dick's hurried trip to Philadelphia, the old lawyer carried Dick into the library to listen to the tale. That which seemed to him the most significant was the discovery that Moore had preceded Dick in his visit to Mrs. Jenkins.

It was quite evident from his talk that he did not anticipate that Dick would learn much that was important from Mrs. Jenkins, but that he had urged him to go upon the principle that no stone should be left unturned. He argued as to Moore's trip, as Dick had done, that it indicated that the conspirators had not secured the information they desired in securing the box, and that the sole purpose of Moore's effort was to supplement such information as they had obtained by a personal interview with the daughter of James Powers.

"In short," said the old lawyer, concluding his remarks, "I do not believe we have lost very much in losing that box. If its contents were conclusive as to the adoption of the child, Moore would not have gone to Philadelphia."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dick, struck by a new thought which had not until then occurred to him, "suppose the information is conclusive, would it not have been the part of wisdom for them, before proceeding further, to have attempted to learn how much Mrs. Jenkins knew as to the contents? And was not that the purpose of Moore's call?"

"You are quite right," said Mr. Stanton promptly, "that did not occur to me. To be sure Moore did not learn anything from Mrs. Jenkins—but he did, on second thought. He did learn that Mrs. Jenkins knew nothing about it and so, if the information disclosed by the contents of the box is conclusive as to the person adopting Edmund Dugdale's child, then their position

is greatly strengthened, for they now know that the only connecting link we have with James Powers is without the knowledge which is within their possession. Yes, they are now in a position to go on boldly to the end, knowing just what to avoid. Such further proof as they may submit we will be unable to combat. There will be a fight before us, and I doubt whether we can get Hetlow to make that fight, because he seems to be strangely inclined to submit to what he calls the inevitable."

"Then we must rely wholly upon Captain Lawton's efforts," said Dick. "He is now engaged in hunting up the antecedents of the men who are in relation to this matter, and if he can find, as he expects to, that they have been connected with some wrong-doing in the past, he will use those crimes as levers to compel them to confession as to this intrigue."

"We do not want to rush into the irrevocable conclusion that Harold Pierson's claim is fraudulent," replied Mr. Stanton warningly. "It may be that, notwithstanding what seems to be suspicious associations, Harold Pierson may be all that he pretends to be. However, you can rely that there will be a demonstration of stronger proof very shortly."

Further conversation on the topic was interrupted by a summons to dinner. When the meal was concluded, Mr. Stanton announced that he was going into the village to attend a meeting in company with Mr. Hetlow and that the hour had already arrived. As he was about to leave the house, Wallis said to him that it was not necessary for him to tell of the arrival of Mr. Mason at Springhill. In answer to her uncle's wondering inquiry as to why he should not, she said that she wanted to reserve the knowledge of Dick's presence as a surprise to Lord Merrimount and Bessie, whom she was expecting momentarily. So promising that he would not inform them her uncle went off.

Indeed he met the two on their way to Springhill.

With the single exception of the meeting on the previous Wednesday night, Dick had not seen Bessie since the day of her spirited scene with her father, and, consequently, he awaited her coming with no little nervousness. He was anxious to know how she would meet him, and he thought from the manner of her greeting he would be enabled to judge to some extent of the meaning of her mysterious note. If she were cold and constrained, did she endeavor to put a guard upon herself and try to hold him at a distance, he thought he would be confirmed in his belief that her father had forbade further intercourse with him and that she had determined to obey the parental mandate. When, however, she met him, although much surprised to see him, her manner was graciousness itself. Indeed it was even more than gracious, for her cheeks flushed deeply and into her eyes leaped a glad light, unmistakable and most reassuring to him. There was no constraint in her manner, but a soft shyness which became her well.

Lord Merrimount's greeting was most cordial. He evidently was glad to see Dick, and, not expecting a meeting, was moved to a little more warmth than he usually displayed.

After some little conversation, which treated solely upon Merrimount's visit to Canada, Wallis suggested that, as darkness fell early at that time of year, they should be off on their excursion. Taking possession of the young Englishman's arm without giving him a choice as to which of the ladies he would offer it, an act, however, which seemed to be entirely agreeable to the young nobleman, she led him away, and by quickening her own step compelled him to walk rapidly. She was thus making good her promise to Dick that she would be his good ally. Perceiving her purpose, Dick moved along at a correspondingly slow pace. Thus he was enabled to secure the interview he had so long and so fruitlessly sought for. And having obtained it, he did not waste his precious moments.

"Ever since I received your note," he said, "I have been in a state of suspense quite hard to bear. You promised you would explain its meaning, but an opportunity has not presented itself until now."

"I fear I made a mistake in writing that letter," replied Bessie hesitatingly, as they walked across the lawn. "It was written upon the impulse of the moment, and I now doubt whether the occasion for its writing ever really existed. I feared at the time you would be subjected to some embarrassment, perhaps humiliation, and I sought to save you from it."

"I thank you for the intent and the kindness which dictated it," replied Dick, "but I imagine the cause has not yet passed away."

Bessie looked up at him quickly, a slight blush spreading over her face as she said hastily, a note of alarm in her tones:

"Why, you do not know what it was!"

"I think there must be some Yankee blood in my veins," laughed Dick lightly, "I am a good guesser. Your father forbade me the house."

His abrupt center shot startled and confused Bessie. She did not reply but walked on, her head bent to the ground.

"I see I have struck the truth," continued Dick.

"Not quite," said Bessie, in a low voice, "he did not forbid you the house."

"Only threatened to?" he asked.

"He did not mean it," admitted Bessie, unconscious of the admission. "He was quite angry at the time. I had made him so, and I think he regretted it as soon as he made the threat. You know that, within two or three days after, he especially requested you to come to the house."

"And you were afraid that I would refuse," laughed Dick; "but then the request was to a conference and not as a guest. However, we will not discuss it further. Only let me tell you how grateful I am and what assurance it gives me to find that whether or not I am to be

subjected to humiliation is a matter of such concern to you that you could seek to save me from it."

This was coming to rather closer quarters than Bessie desired. Perhaps it is not correct to say that she did not desire it, but, nevertheless, she recognized something in Dick's tone and manner which made her believe that, now the opportunity presented itself, he was not disposed to let it pass by without bringing matters to an issue between them. From this she shrank, more perhaps by reason of her maidenly modesty than from an intention to deny him. Dick grew bolder as he went on.

"Miss Hetlow—Bessie—I will not pretend that I do not comprehend what lay back of that note. But whatever it was it cannot prevent me now, no matter what may be the attitude of your father toward me—and nothing compels me to ask or to seek to learn—from asking to know how it stands with me. You are under no doubt as to the state of my feelings with regard to you. On that day by the riverside when my passion—love for you—broke its bounds, I told you how deep and unconquerable it was. And when you averted your face from me and I believed your heart was cold, and crushed and stricken I left you, it was with the promise to myself, expressed to you in words, that I would seek you again and tell you of it. The time is here; I do tell you of it. I tell you that that love possesses me—that it is deep, enduring, and unconquerable. I could not control it if I would. I know that I am bringing all my fortunes—nay, my life and my future, to the test. And I know that having done so, if you are to say me nay, all the joy, all the purpose of my life will be taken from me. I cannot recollect the time since you were a little girl, not more than a babe, and I but a boy, when I did not love you. To grow, to work, to make myself worthy of the time when I could lay my heart and myself at your feet has been the incentive of all these years. Well, the time

is here. I go to the test. I am not so worthy as in those boyish dreams I promised myself I should be, but here I am before you, pleading, ready to accept what may follow, seeing hope, brightness, happiness in the one event; despair, darkness, and a life before me from which the light is quenched, in the other."

They were moving slowly across the grass as Dick talked, his voice trembling with the intensity of his passion, and Bessie with her cheeks aflame. Her eyes were cast upon the ground and Dick's head bent forward toward her in an anxious endeavor to discover the effect his words were producing. Trembling so much that she did not dare trust herself to speak, and indeed not knowing what reply to make, were she to give herself tongue, she was silent. Her face was not averted this time, it had been bent when he began to talk and she had not lifted it. Dick waited for some reply, but none being forthcoming he went on, and this time with some uncertainty in his tone, as if he were making great effort to keep himself within bounds. When his voice again fell upon her ear there was in it a quality of pathos which touched her.

"Of course," he said, "I cannot expect you to comprehend what this means to me. It is life, it is everything." He hesitated a moment and then, as if he could no longer control himself, he exclaimed: "O God! Have I been living in a fool's paradise? Have I been taking the mere kindness of a womanly heart for tenderness? Is my life's dream at last at an end?"

Bessie lifted her head with a quick, impulsive motion and turned her shining blue eyes upon him, those eyes in which Dick saw not only the tears trembling, but the lovelight dancing. He impulsively caught her hand, fully satisfied and overwhelmed with joy, though she had spoken never a word. Merri-mount and Wallis had now passed over the brow of the hill. They were out of sight of the house, but if

they had not been, and if their companions were still in view, it is doubtful whether Dick, so suddenly lifted from the depths of despair, could have restrained his actions. He stopped short, caught Bessie in his arms, and impressed upon her lips that first kiss which as he had said had been the dream of his life. And the truth compels the statement that Bessie made no effort to escape from the embrace, at least, not for some moments. They stood for some time, both of them giving themselves up to the delirious joy of love declared and love reciprocated. It was Bessie who first recovered possession of her senses, and who brought them both down from the clouds in which they had been floating.

"This is not the way I intended it should be," she said, laughing almost hysterically. "We have begun at the wrong end. I meant to have told you what occurred between my father and myself, but you did not give me time to do so."

"It matters little now," cried Dick valiantly, "since I know that you love me I care not what he thinks or says."

"But I have not told you I love you," replied Bessie, demurely and mischievously.

"Not in words, to be sure, but in the most eloquent of ways, by eyes beaming and face glorified," replied Dick earnestly and irrationally, growing maudlin in his joy, "but no matter what your father may say, or think, or do, crowned with your love I am strong enough to battle a regiment of opposing fathers, though they all deny me the house and forbid intercourse with the daughter."

"He did neither one nor the other," she replied. "I will tell you all, which I ought to have done at first, though I don't see when I think of it how I could have done so, but that day when we came over to Springhill and you were playing at tennis, Mrs. Stanton told father that you had—well, that you did not

dislike me, and when father called me from the game and made me go back with him he asked me if that were so and I was not satisfactory, and so he asked me if I—loved you——”

Bessie hesitated. The eager Dick could not wait for her to go on and said:

“And you told him of course that you did not.”

“No, I did not tell him that,” answered Bessie, lifting beaming eyes to him shyly, “I could not tell him that.” Her words came slowly and hesitatingly now, but after some struggle with her modesty she went on: “I told him that if you were to pay me that highest compliment a man can pay a woman, and should ask me to be wife to you, I should say yes.”

It is well they were in the shrubbery and out of sight.

When Dick released her again, she looked up at him with burning cheeks and a merry twinkle in her eye: “But,” she said, “I was safe in doing so, for you see you have not asked me, and so father was not in such danger after all.”

It is needless to say that Dick determined immediately to put her father in all possible danger, and to the question Bessie replied softly that she would be, out that she would not marry him until her father gave his consent or, she added by way of amendment, until he had been given ample opportunity to consent.

By this time Wallis was evidently of the belief that Dick had been given all the time he was entitled to, for her voice was heard calling to them. They now hastened on. But Wallis had a purpose other than putting an end to the interview she had promised Dick, and was seeking on her own account a diversion.

Certain events which had occurred had proved Bessie to be a prophet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN IMMINENT PERIL.

WHILE Bessie and Dick were thus engaged, as described in the previous chapter, Lord Merrimount had been telling Wallis of his excursion into Canada, and had been saying that, notwithstanding he had met a number of friends from the other side, he had found Canada very dull; that he was very glad to return and he was astonished to find how attached he had become to "The Larches" and the people about it. And he concluded by saying that the desire to see them all again had been the chief reason for cutting his trip so short.

"And I think," he said, looking down upon Wallis with an expression in his eyes she had never before noticed, "and I think the chief desire was really to see again a single person."

Wallis looked at him quickly and sharply, and, with a little trace of sarcasm in her tone, replied:

"Indeed, the single person so favored ought to be flattered."

"I don't want her to feel flattered," returned Merrimount. "If she will accept the statement in the sense I intend it, I will be only too well pleased."

"Oh, it is a she then," answered Wallis. "Please don't give me your confidence on the matter. I have been standing the guardian angel over one love affair for the past few weeks, and I don't want another on my hands."

Merrimount, looking upon her as a smile played about his lips and an increase of tenderness came into his tone, remarked:

"Perhaps you might be induced to assume a different position in this affair."

Wallis noticed both the increase of tenderness of tone and the significance of his words. Alarmed and annoyed, she replied, and this time with some asperity in her tone:

"Now don't be foolish, Lord Merrimount, and spoil good friendship by trying to be gallant. You are much more endurable when you are simply an English gentleman."

"I don't want you to regard me as anything else," he replied very soberly. "I am both earnest and truthful when I tell you that it was a charming little person, with a ready tongue and bright eyes, who was the chief cause of my quick return. I never knew until I had gone away how much her companionship was to me."

By this time they had left Bessie and Dick far behind and reached the roof of the tunnel. Wallis cast a swift upward glance at him; encountering his dark brown eyes keenly scrutinizing her, she suddenly left his side and walked hastily to the platform from which she could look down upon the railroad tracks below. Merrimount followed her and taking place beside her laid his hand upon hers as it rested upon the rail. He said kindly and indeed earnestly:

"Do not misunderstand me. I am very much in earnest. Regarding you as I do, the last thing I should attempt to do would be to trifle with you! I am in no trifling mood. During all my journey, when my face was turned in this direction, I thought of little else than the approaching time when I could say these things to you and——"

"Stop!" cried Wallis, interrupting him and drawing her hand hastily from under his, as she turned upon him sharply and squarely, her eyes flashing and her face suffused.

"You have no right to say these things to me. Surely

you have seen nothing in my conduct justifying you in the belief that I would listen to anything of this kind. I have accepted you as the guest of our neighbor, and had begun to treat you as a friend. I do not know why you should seek to deliberately affront me."

"It is no affront for a man to say to the woman he loves, that he does so love her," returned Merrimount. "The woman may not return that love, but whether she accepts it or not she cannot say there is an affront in the telling."

"It is an affront," replied Wallis hotly, "when the man, coming with the avowed intention of marrying another girl, thinks he can, while waiting for the favorable issue of one suit, induce the friend of that girl to listen to him when she is not by."

The young Englishman was amazed. Drawing himself up coldly, he said sternly: "You mystify me. You have made a charge which you must explain."

Wallis was not to be awed by his manner. She replied to him with even more indignation:

"You shall have the explanation, and my opinion as well. You came to this country with the proposition to Mr. Hetlow to marry his daughter, provided she was indeed the heir to the Dugdale estate. And you have been waiting before making your suit to Bessie, to learn whether or not Harold Pierson was the heir, or whether Bessie would not in the end inherit those millions. And if you desire it, you may have my opinion of the cold-hearted calculation of such a course. Even in practical America, where we are all tradesmen, we stop in our pursuit of dollars to infuse a little warmth and a little love-making into our marriage. But I don't want to criticise you, yet I do want you to understand that while you are thus waiting for one affair to end, you cannot amuse yourself with me."

As Wallis talked she grew more angry, because she saw the expression of wonder and amazement chased

from the face of the young Englishman by one of intense amusement. When she had concluded, she looked him fully in the eyes, and was not unconscious of the look of deep admiration with which he was regarding her. So angry was she on perceiving this, that she turned to go from him, but was detained by his next speech.

"One moment," he said. "You have made your explanation and I thank you." He bowed to her in his most courtly manner. "Let me make my answer now. I did not come here as a suitor for the hand of Miss Bessie. I never made such a proposition to Mr. Hetlow, I never dreamed that anyone would suppose or did suppose that such was the purpose of my visit. It never occurred to me that anyone could think so."

"Why persist in such folly?" cried Wallis indignantly. "I am very young, I know, but that fact should entitle me to the forbearance of a man of the world."

"You need forbearance for something else," replied Merrimount quietly. "You are very irritating, but also very charming." Wallis gave an indignant toss of her head.

"Did not Mr. Mason hear you make such a proposition to Mr. Hetlow?"

"No," said Merrimount slowly, "he did not. Mr. Mason may have overheard, and I think he did, the concluding portion of a conversation relating to a proposition I submitted to Mr. Hetlow. But it had nothing to do with marrying or with proposing to marry."

Wallis looked upon him with deep incredulity. Smiling over it the young nobleman went on:

"I see that you are under a very grave misapprehension," he laughed. "Be patient with me, and I will tell you. My father, the Duke of Mountchessington is much embarrassed. The revenues of the estates have been greatly reduced, and portions of them must

be sacrificed unless some other source of revenue can be obtained. So, when Mr. Dugdale died, and it was believed by the solicitor that the estate would pass into the hands of a young girl who would have no wish to conduct, or continue the wool business, it was proposed, by that solicitor, that I should proceed immediately to America with an offer from my father to purchase as large an interest in that business as the duke could buy, and that I should begin a career as a wool merchant. When I reached here I found that Mr. Hetlow was engaged in a search for the son of Edmund Dugdale, with a prospect of finding him, who, if found, would become the heir. Because of this Mr. Hetlow said it would be useless to consider the duke's proposition, and he kindly invited me to remain here a guest, until such time as this search might result in something definite."

Wallis was covered with confusion. All her anger and indignation faded away as she realized how they had all been misled.

"What a lot of fools we have all been," she exclaimed.

The young nobleman laughed aloud at her confusion, enjoying the joke hugely, now that he appreciated from Wallis's words how his errand to America had been misapprehended.

"Miss Hetlow would indeed be inducement for any man to cross the water as her suitor," he said. "But as attractive as she may be, there is one who is still more attractive to me."

Wallis's cheeks were covered with blushes. The spirit with which she had faced the young Englishman had fled, and she was seeking somewhere to place her eyes where they would not encounter those dark kindly ones of Merrimount resolutely determined to find hers.

"Well," he went on, after a moment or two, "have I not earned the right to say these things to you?" Wallis could not reply. All her readiness was gone. For a brief and insane moment, she contemplated a

leap over the rail to the rocks below. A train thundering out of the tunnel, with a screaming whistle, put an end to the idea and gave her, while its noise lasted, an opportunity to repossess herself. Merrimount, finding that he had obtained an advantage, pursued it.

"I have not affronted you, have I?" he asked, smiling tenderly upon her.

"No," Wallis replied, but in such low accents that he could but barely hear her.

"And I do have the right to say to you that I love you and that almost from the beginning I have loved you?" He looked to her for some response, but none was made. "It is true," he went on, "I did not know how deeply I did love you until after I had parted from you and realized how much I missed your bright presence. And then I made up my mind to come back so that I could tell you of it."

Still Wallis could not find that tongue usually so ready with sharp retort and quaint conceit. She had been humbled too much in her own estimation to recover quickly, and was too busy with thinking how absurd she had been in thus presuming to lecture the man, who was so earnestly pleading his own cause with her, for something of which he was not guilty. She was not then, by any means, the frolicsome sprite. Though she would not answer, Merrimount guessed why, and was determined that he would not let her escape.

"Am I to understand that my suit finds no favor with you? Or may I take silence for the consent I so much desire?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Wallis hastily, refusing to be carried away in so summary a manner.

"Do you mean to tell me," he persisted, "that you have no regard for me?"

"No, I do not mean that," replied Wallis, looking first on one side and then the other for a way to escape.

"Then you do like me?"

"No—yes—oh, I don't know what I mean," cried

Wallis irritably, angry with herself that she was not under better control.

"Then let me tell you," said Merrimount, possessing himself of her hand again. "Let me speak for you, as I want you to speak. Let me say that you do, and let me make you Lady Merrimount."

Wallis stole a glance at him from under her dark lashes and saw the deep, earnest love shining in his eyes. She knew that he was sincere, and she was touched by his simple and unaffected pleading. She did not take her hand from him, although she suddenly came into self-possession.

"This has been so unexpected," she said, "that I do not know what to reply. I am so confused by my blunder and by my presumption in lecturing you—and I have been so mistaken and have done you such wrong that I can't think. You know I never thought of this. I always thought you meant to marry Bessie if she had the money. I do like you, but I liked you as a friend and I wanted to like you, if you were going to be the husband of my dear friend. But you see I don't know."

She withdrew her hand not unkindly, and walked away a step or two. Merrimount followed her.

"Then I will not press my suit to-night," he said tenderly, "but I will not deny myself hope. I will come again and again to you until I get my answer."

"But I am so poor!" cried Wallis.

"So am I," laughed Merrimount. "I have only a beggarly thousand. But you know I am going into trade, so I can make enough."

"And I said I'd never marry a poor man," said Wallis, looking up at him with a laugh.

Then she ran away from him and called for Bessie. Her call had interrupted the love-making of the others, and they came to her quite hurriedly—indeed quite shamefacedly—but Merrimount and Wallis were too much interested in their own affairs to notice acutely the manner of the others.

"You have loitered so long," said Wallis, endeavoring to conceal her own confusion, "and it is growing so late, I fear we cannot go on the water."

"Oh, yes, we can," interposed Merrimount. "If it is only for a short pull."

"Well, then, let us go at once," said Wallis, walking off in the direction of the steps with Merrimount.

"But, Bessie," suddenly cried Dick, "you have no wrap with you. You cannot go on the river without one."

"I left it on the veranda," replied Bessie, "but never mind. I will not need it."

"But indeed you will," persisted Dick; "go on with Merrimount and Wallis, and I will run back to the house for it."

Before Bessie could interpose an objection, he was off and away. She therefore joined the other two, and together the three descended the steps that led to the water's edge.

The boat was in readiness for them at the beach, and in charge of the man who was the one Dick had supposed he had seen more than once in the companionship of Ransom. He got up from the stone upon which he was sitting and, taking off his cap, said to Bessie: "Am I to go with you?"

Bessie told him that the gentlemen would row. Saying that he would be back to take care of the boat when they returned, the man walked away up the shore. Wallis had wandered to the rocks in the direction of the railroad track, and was now descending to the level of the track itself. Merrimount called the warning after her, that she might find some cars on the line, as he termed it. By this time she had reached the tracks, and she called back for Bessie and Merrimount to come down, that she had a sight to show them.

Bessie and the young nobleman followed her. She pointed out to them the headlight of a locomotive just entering the other end of the tunnel. It was running

with considerable rapidity, and the three standing upon the track watched the light growing larger and larger as it approached.

While they were thus occupied they heard a shout, and looking up they saw Dick on the roof of the tunnel, at that point where it was guarded by a rail, struggling with two men. For a moment the three did not realize what the struggle meant. Soon, to their horror, they discovered that the two men were endeavoring to thrust Dick over the precipice. Immediately that Lord Merrimount realized what they were trying to do, he shouted to Dick:

"Fight the beggars hard. I am coming to you!"

With this he rapidly began the ascent of the rocks, not waiting to take the easier but longer means of the stairs.

Dick was making a gallant struggle with the two men. He was holding his own, though his assailants redoubled their efforts when they saw Merrimount climbing rapidly to his assistance.

Horror-stricken, and Bessie almost frantic in her fear, the two girls watched from below the varying chances of the unequal struggle above. The train in the tunnel was approaching them, its thundering noise falling more loudly upon their ears. They heeded it not, so intently were they watching Dick's fierce struggle for life.

Merrimount had climbed two-thirds of the distance, and was rapidly gaining the top, when a third man appeared and threw himself upon Dick. Against him Dick could not prevail. Inch by inch the three forced him to the edge of the rocks. Wallis screamed as she perceived that Dick was lost, but Bessie, in whom the blood had ceased to flow as she saw the lover, who but a brief half hour previous had imprinted his first kiss upon her lips, surely forced to his death, could utter neither moan nor shriek. The agony of years was crowded into a brief moment. She was conscious of

nothing, but that the man to whom she had given all the love of her soul was being murdered in her sight—the man for whom she would have gladly yielded up her own life, but for whom she could do nothing. The struggle lasted but an instant and Dick toppled over. Lord Merrimount saw him fall, and cried out:

“O God, he’s gone!”

At the same moment the wild, warning screech of the approaching train reached his ears.

A new horror!

Wallis and Bessie were on the track, unconscious of its coming. Clinging desperately to the trees by which he was climbing, he yelled to Wallis and Bessie to get off the track.

Wallis heard him and, realizing her own danger, tried to drag Bessie from it. But Bessie, with her eyes riveted upon Dick, possessed by the horror of the scene, paid no attention. She was rooted to the ground.

As Dick was overcome, he had fallen only a few feet when he caught a small bush with both hands, thus arresting his fall. The bush, however, gave away with his weight and Bessie, who had one wild and delirious moment of joy, as she saw his fall arrested, was filled with horror a second time as she saw the bush torn out by its roots, and Dick again plunged downward.

He struck a projecting ledge and caught again. The rock crumbling under his hands, he slipped down to another projection where, for a moment, he secured another hold, only to find it broken under his hands, and to be precipitated downward again.

Bessie, who had been passing rapidly through the alternations of joy and despair, shrieked aloud, but changed her shrieks to heartfelt thanks to God, as she saw him finally and securely clutch a small but stout hemlock.

This time indeed he had secured a firm hold, but it

was by his hands alone. His feet were dangling over the open cut of the tunnel, twenty feet from the ground.

A new danger presented itself!

Now Bessie became keenly aware of the approach of the train. She did not know that the alert engineer of the approaching locomotive had seen her upon the track and was reversing his engine. All she did see was that Dick, who had gallantly struggled for his life on the top of the roof, and had not lost his head when falling, but had endeavored manfully to seize every advantage, was now in imminent danger of being struck by the stack of the locomotive, as it issued from the tunnel.

She screamed aloud. She frantically cried to Dick to make him aware of his danger. She could not make him understand.

With a wild scream she rushed from the track, hastily climbed the rock in the path of Merrimount, who was now as rapidly descending, and, without regard for her soft white hands, climbed with all the energy of desperation, and reached a point nearest to Dick's dangling feet. At the risk of being dashed to the ground beneath, she reached forward and caught his feet, pulling them as far toward her as her strength, that of a giant in her excitement, would permit her.

At this moment Merrimount reached her, and throwing himself on his face, until more than half his body projected over the rocks, grasped her about the waist, holding her securely while she maintained her grasp on Dick's feet. In the instant the stack of the locomotive passed within an inch of Dick's legs, the fumes and the gases therefrom almost stifling her, as it passed under.

But now the engine came to a stop, with the roof of the cab immediately under Dick.

Merrimount saw this and, calling to Bessie that Dick was now safe, bade her let go of his feet, and cried to

Dick to let himself drop on to the roof of the cab, which he did, falling weak and exhausted.

The danger that Merrimount and Bessie were now in was more real than appeared from below.

Bessie, while grasping Dick's feet, had maintained her hold by her right hand clinging to a small tree. When Merrimount had bade her let go her hold on Dick, she had obeyed, and at the same time relaxed her grip upon the tree by which she had supported herself. The consequence was, she was wholly borne up by Merrimount, who was almost thrown over the rocks by this additional weight.

He spoke to her calmly, telling her to take hold again, but, receiving no reply, he found that she had fainted in his arms, in that extraordinary position. The passengers had poured out of the train, and everything was confusion below, as Dick was lifted from the cab. Merrimount could not make himself heard by those beneath, and so, knowing that he must either push himself back, or finally succumb to the dead weight of Bessie's body, momentarily growing heavier and heavier, began a desperate effort to wriggle backward to a position where he would have a greater leverage.

He received unexpected assistance. It was Wallis who, perceiving his predicament, when recovering from the partial swoon into which she had been thrown by fright, had come to his assistance, and grasping him by the ankles was pulling him backward. As slight as the assistance was, it was just sufficient, and in a moment he was safe on secure rock with Bessie still in his arms.

She recovered almost immediately, and their descent to the track was quickly accomplished.

Making their way to Dick they found him standing in a group of curious people, who were endeavoring to elicit some explanation from him, ragged and torn, with blood on his face and hands, dazed by the shocks

he had received. Singularly, during all his struggle and his fall, Bessie's wrap, for which he had gone back, had clung to him. He did one of those strange things which, when misunderstood, are called bravado.

He looked at Bessie stupidly, and extending the garment to her said :

“ Here is your wrap.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

THE excursion upon the river was abandoned.

Lord Merrimount led Dick away, as soon as he was permitted to escape from the crowd, anxious to know the cause of the excitement, followed by Bessie and Wallis, still greatly agitated by the ordeal through which they had passed. Though much bruised and cut Dick recovered quickly from the dazed condition which immediately followed his rescue, and was soon enabled, as they walked toward Springhill, to tell how he had been attacked.

He told them that as he reached the roof of the tunnel, hurrying rapidly with Bessie's wrap thrown over his shoulder, two men sprang out from behind a clump of low trees, and without word or threat seized him upon either side and rushed him toward the edge of the precipice. His surprise at this attack had been so great that it was not until he was on its very brink that he made effort to resist them. He thought he would have succeeded in his struggle, had it not been for the aid given his assailants by a third man, who approached from behind and whose added strength forced him over.

Notwithstanding the nervous condition he was naturally in, he did not fail to note with secret joy in his heart that Bessie made no effort to conceal her air of proprietorship of him, though apparently it was unnoticed by either Lord Merrimount or Wallis, preternaturally sharp as the latter always was. It is doubtful whether Dick at that time reasoned upon the matter, and if he had it is probable he would have ascribed

their failure to perceive this to the absorbing interest in the exciting event through which they had all passed. Of course he did not know what had passed between Merrimount and Wallis before he and Bessie had come up to them.

When they reached the veranda of Springhill Mr. Hetlow came out hurriedly from the hall, followed by Mr. Stanton. It was now almost dark, but yet all could notice upon the face of Mr. Hetlow an expression of anger and stern resolve, and one of anxiety upon that of Mr. Stanton. Dick's appearance quite evidently changed their mood into one of astonished curiosity, and whatever it might have been that Mr. Hetlow intended to say when he came out to meet them was lost in the desire to know what had occurred. Bessie and Wallis attempted to tell it at the same time, and succeeded only in impressing upon the minds of the two elderly gentlemen that something of a horrible nature had occurred, without giving them a very clear understanding as to what it was. Finally, having exhausted themselves, Lord Merrimount said to Mr. Stanton, noticing that Dick had seated himself upon the steps with the air of one very weak and in great pain, that the first thing to be done was to take Dick to his room where he could receive the attention he needed, and he thought it would be wise to send for a surgeon at once. While he did not believe that the injuries received by Dick were of a serious nature, nevertheless, as a matter of precaution, an examination ought to be made as quickly as possible.

Whereupon Dick was carried to his room and made comfortable, while Mr. Stanton dispatched a servant for a physician. While he was thus engaged Merrimount told in a circumstantial manner what had occurred, modestly leaving himself and his own achievements out of the account, and giving great praise to the brave efforts of the young ladies. He grew positively enthusiastic, however, as he recounted the gallant struggle of Dick for his life.

When Mr. Hetlow learned from Mr. Stanton that Dick was at Springhill, and had gone upon a river excursion with Bessie and the others, he had insisted upon returning immediately. He had erroneously jumped to the conclusion that it was a part of a plan between his daughter and Dick to get together—a plan entered into surreptitiously and without his knowledge. This had made him angry and he had returned full of wrath, determined upon a vigorous policy, which would leave neither his daughter nor Dick in doubt as to his feelings upon the subject. The event of the night, however, had made his programme impossible. And when Mr. Stanton returned from Dick's bedroom, saying that the latter expected to be down in a short time, and began to comment upon the effort to take Dick's life, going to the conclusion, vigorously expressed, that the event could not be separated from the Harold Pierson claim, Mr. Hetlow was greatly troubled.

He had combated from the first what he called the extreme theories of Mr. Stanton and Dick, but here was an overt act, for which there seemed to be no good reason unless one was to be found in the urgency of the old lawyer. He had pointed out to Mr. Hetlow that Dick had been, from the time of the discovery of Harold Pierson, energetic in insisting upon a strict examination into his claims, that he had discovered the young claimant in suspicious surroundings, that he had employed the detective force, and had been instrumental in seeking out Mrs. Jenkins, and had only recently returned from a journey to Philadelphia where he had been preceded by Moore on precisely the same errand, all of which was undoubtedly known to these men whom Mr. Stanton now called boldly the conspirators.

Mr. Stanton was very much in earnest, not to say excited, and he delivered his arguments and piled up his evidence with such vigor that Mr. Hetlow was overborne and made no attempt to answer. Indeed he

was much agitated over the idea that Dick, who had engaged in this work through no desire of his own, but at his employer's solicitation, should have been injured and put into such imminent peril of his life in his service. Therefore he did not reply, although he by no means acquiesced in all the old lawyer insisted upon.

The surgeon soon arrived, and Bessie and Mr. Hetlow waited for his report. Perhaps a half an hour passed, during which time the party on the veranda discussed the attempt, before the physician descended the stairs. When he did so Dick accompanied him.

The surgeon's report was that no bones had been broken ; that he did not believe Dick had sustained any serious internal injuries ; but that he naturally had been much bruised, and had received several contusions which would give him some trouble for a time, and that for several days he would be sore and stiff. But that which he thought was most serious was the nervous shock which he had sustained, and he advised quiet and rest for a time, and said upon his return to the village he would send him some medicines which he thought would help him to a speedy recovery. Mr. Stanton thereupon emphatically said that Springhill was the place for that rest and quiet, and that Dick must remain there until recovered.

Thereupon, expressing the hope that nothing serious would result, Mr. Hetlow proposed to return to "The Larches." Bessie rose to accompany him, and cast upon Dick a look of divine pity and affection which did not escape her father. Lord Merrimount said that he would remain awhile with Mason and return later. So Mr. Hetlow led his daughter away. As soon as they were out of earshot of the house he asked his daughter sternly what it all meant.

"It means," said Bessie, "that Mr. Mason escaped being murdered by the merest chance."

"I know that," replied her father sharply, "and I regret it as much as any man can, since it is supposed, although I do not believe it, that this mishap occurred in our service. I do not mean that. I want to know what was the meaning of this meeting without my knowledge."

"I presume you mean between Mr. Mason and myself," replied Bessie, not evading the issue her father sought. "That was purely accidental. Until I went to Springhill with Lord Merrimount, I did not know that Mr. Mason was there. He had come up quite unexpectedly, although Wallis had written for him to come. Not knowing whether he was in town, she had not informed anyone that he might possibly arrive."

This was true, as Mr. Hetlow had learned from Mr. Stanton earlier in the evening. It was a moment or two before he spoke again.

"I should have supposed," he said, "that, after our conversation upon this topic some time ago, you would have refused to go upon the river with him."

"I should have done so, had the proposal been for me to go with him alone," she replied. "But there was nothing in our conversation which was anything like a command from you that I was not to talk with him when we met. You had threatened to forbid him the house, but subsequently you asked him there, and you saw me meet him and talk with him, briefly to be sure."

"But that was in my presence," replied her father sternly; "you know very well, if I did not put my thought in the form of a command, that what I sought to do was to put an end to the relation between you, and especially after your unwomanly declaration that, if he were to offer himself, you would accept him."

The use of the word "unwomanly" aroused Bessie's spirit.

"After what I have passed through this evening," she said, "I do not feel like entering into a contest

of words with you. Indeed I am not equal to it, for I have been more shocked than you evidently understand; I am very weak. Your use of that word is unlike you. In nothing that I said to you is there any justification for its use. But I do not propose to evade the responsibilities or consequences of my acts. I will tell you frankly, so that neither of us shall be under any misapprehension, that to-night Mr. Mason asked me to be his wife. And I said yes."

"You did?" almost shouted Mr. Hetlow.

"Yes, I told him so," she replied quietly. "I think I told you I would; but I further told him that I would not marry him until I had gained your consent."

Mr. Hetlow stopped, so great was his astonishment at this concession of his daughter. Ever since their previous conversation, when she had turned from a child into a strong, determined woman displaying a spirit as firm as his own, he had stood somewhat in awe of her. That she had done that which she said she would do, and yet had made this concession to him, left him almost speechless, and he hardly knew how to meet the situation.

"I am glad you have considered me," he said, in a strangely altered tone, "and I will insist that you keep to your promise, that you have thus made without its exactation on my part. This is a serious matter, and I freely confess that I do not know how to deal with it. Until I shall have had time to reason coolly and without prejudice upon it, I do not think it is too much to ask of you that you will keep it." They walked on for some distance in silence. At length Mr. Hetlow spoke again:

"This matter is full of embarrassments, and I think that I have the right to exact the further promise from you that, until such time as I can arrive at a conclusion as to the proper course to pursue, Mason shall not be received at my house, and that you shall cease all intercourse with him."

"As to his being received at your house," replied Bessie, "I can say nothing. You are master there and may say who shall enter and who shall not, but as to my intercourse with the man whom I have accepted as my lover, and whom I have promised to marry when your consent is obtained, I shall refuse to make any such promise. Do not fear," she added hastily, "that I will seek to meet him secretly, or that I will make appointments to meet him. I have too much pride for that. But when I do meet him, I shall not avoid him. I shall be glad when such meetings occur and I shall not alter the daily course of my life in order to avoid him. I will make no such promise."

By this time they had reached the house. As they entered the door Bessie, who had borne up under this added strain of a contest with her father, could stand it no longer, and without warning reeled and fainted. Mr. Hetlow caught her as she was falling, loudly calling for assistance. As he bore her to a lounge he blamed himself for his cruelty in forcing this issue upon her at such a time.

She recovered shortly. But an end was put to further discussion of her engagement.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DECISIVE BLOW.

WHILE all of these events were occurring the four conspirators were having frequent consultations as to the course to be pursued under the developments of the week. There was division in the councils. Orton Pierson was inclined to the belief that no further demonstration should be made until time had elapsed to allow the people at Dobbs Ferry to recover from their wonder and excitement over the burglary. They had all concluded, since there had been no showing to the contrary, that they could rely upon the truth of Mrs. Stanton's statements that she had so disposed of the box that she could neither give it to them nor obtain it herself. Although Mrs. Stanton had undoubtedly conveyed that impression to Bob, it had not in fact been her intention to do so, nor was she aware at the time, or subsequently, that she had done so. That Bob believed it, however, was a strong point in the consideration of their future movements.

Moore was strongly of the opinion that they should go forward with all possible rapidity. He argued that the box was out out of the way with its contents whatever it might show, and was as far away from Mr. Hetlow and Mr. Stanton as it was from them. He pointed out that Mrs. Jenkins was totally ignorant as to the meaning of the contents, and that if it did not argue there was little of value or significance to be obtained from them, at least the people at Dobbs Ferry were estopped by her ignorance from arriving at the truth. The arrival of the London solicitor, he urged, could not be long delayed, and it was necessary for

them to appear before Mr. Hetlow with such indubitable proof as would not only put an end to any suspicion he might have but put him into a condition of mind to say to that solicitor, when he did arrive, that there was nothing to be gained by struggling against the plain facts.

"In short," he said, "we will gain nothing by waiting but to prolong the effort and permit suspicion to harden into belief."

In this he was supported by both Ransom and Bob. When, however, the news was brought to them that the men placed at Springhill by Ransom had attempted the life of Mason there was consternation. Ransom was bitterly blamed by the other three for having attempted a plan, which, even if successful, could have done no more than to have gotten out of the way a man who was giving them trouble by reason of his determined suspicions and his efforts to prove them, and who, being killed, would have had his place supplied by someone else, with even a stronger motive for arriving at knowledge. But having failed, it was even worse, and Mason would now have added to his former suspicions the conviction that the attempt upon his life was because he had entertained such suspicions.

Ransom denied energetically that he had given such instructions to his men, and declared that they had exceeded them. He said the part that they were to play was wholly that of spies. While there was no expression on the part of anyone present indicating that they doubted his word, nevertheless all of them were filled with disbelief.

It was Bob who now urged immediate action.

"Whatever truth there was in Moore's argument before," he said, "it is doubly true now. I must submit those proofs at once. To delay now would be to confirm all the suspicions they may have. To go there now, right on the heels of this affair, would carry

the idea that I, at least, was not a party to it. I confess I have no particular desire to go there. The probability is that my treatment will not be such as to make it particularly pleasant, but I see no way of escaping it. It is a time when we must put on our boldest front, play our game out to the end, leading the trump card." He was silent for a moment, and then added, "I wonder who that fellow was who went to his assistance. Do your men not know, Ransom?"

Ransom replied that he did not know of any man being there, saying probably that it was someone visiting there temporarily.

"Well," said Bob, "it is not a matter of importance; only I like to know whom I am to meet there."

The course suggested by Bob was agreed upon by all, even Orton Pierson, who had said that since the attempt on Mason they must either do as suggested by Bob, or give the whole affair up. Whereupon the proofs which had been prepared by Pierson and Moore were produced and discussed.

These papers were, of course, all forgeries.

And it was proposed that Bob should represent to Mr. Hetlow and the others that, in a search for further proof, Orton Pierson had found these papers among the effects of his deceased wife.

The letter purporting to have been written by Edmund Dugdale was the boldest of all, for it was known that Mr. Hetlow had in his possession a number of letters unquestionably written by Edmund Dugdale. When Mr. Hetlow, at a time when neither Dick nor Mr. Stanton were present, had shown to Harold Pierson the papers he had received from the London solicitor, Bob had slipped, when unobserved, a small scrap of paper from among them into his pocket—a scrap containing writing, which he had quickly judged upon a hasty examination to be the same as that of the Dugdale letters. They were not certain that it was.

but arguing themselves into the belief, they had entered upon this risky venture. Accordingly Bob addressed a note to Mr. Hetlow, saying that some further proof had come to light, which he wished to submit and to consult him about, especially with a view to a comparison with some of the papers in the hands of Mr. Hetlow. And he said, in this letter, that unless he heard to the contrary from Mr. Hetlow, he should visit him at "The Larches" on the following afternoon at three o'clock.

"He will not be able, under this short notice," said Bob grimly, "to deny me admittance. I will take good care not to be in the way of any message to the contrary."

This was considered by all to be the decisive blow of their enterprise, and they departed from the place of meeting with no little degree of anxiety as to the outcome.

While this enterprise was going forward Mrs. Stanton at Springhill was in great trouble. She had been greatly shocked by the attack made upon Dick and its consequences. Moreover she had been greatly frightened, as she listened to her husband's argument that the assault came from those who were connected in some way with Harold Pierson. While she endeavored to persuade herself that such could not be the case, nevertheless the fear that it might be so was giving her many uneasy moments. She bitterly regretted that she had entered into any arrangement with Harold Pierson. It seemed to her that, from that moment, nothing but trouble and disaster had followed. More than once she had been upon the point of confiding in Wallis and asking her advice as to what she should do. But she had been deterred through fear of her husband's anger, and therefore had refrained from even giving any information as to the box. She had gone to great lengths

in endeavors to have the box found. She had frequently slipped into the library alone, and as frequently drawn out the drawer in which it was, leaving it open in the hope that someone would discover it. But as frequently someone had gone in and closed it. She had even taken precautions on one occasion to take out all of the old papers with which she had covered it in order that it might attract attention, resting alone in the drawer. But even then someone had closed the drawer without seeing the box she so much desired to be discovered, through no agency of hers. Yet notwithstanding her ingenuous efforts the box remained persistently hidden.

During the afternoon of the next day Lord Merrimount and Bessie came over to Springhill, the avowed purpose of their call being to inquire after Dick and his injuries. As subsequent events developed it was shown that each had a purpose carefully concealed from the other. Notwithstanding Mr. Hetlow's opposition, Bessie had accompanied Lord Merrimount at the latter's request. Her father, indeed, had made no objection at the time of Merrimount's suggestion, that is, in words, although the cloud that gathered upon his brow showed Bessie he was much displeased. She was not deterred, however, and promptly supported the young nobleman's proposition, and together they walked away, leaving her father to deal with his wrath as best he might.

On arrival at Springhill, they found the family gathered on the veranda. Dick was bearing the marks of his fall, shown in severe cuts on his face and hard bruises, while he was so stiff and sore he could move only with difficulty. Their conversation dealt with the events of the preceding day, and Mr. Stanton again argued his belief that the assault upon Dick was in some way to be traced to Harold Pierson or those associated with him. As they talked Bessie

took her place beside Dick, and assumed a relation to him which made Wallis open her black eyes in wide wonder. It seemed to her that the interview for which she had maneuvered had borne its fruits. So much engrossed had she been with the exciting scene of Dick's fall and the previous one of Merrimount's love-making, that she had utterly forgotten the one to which she had said she was the guardian angel.

When she saw Merrimount appear, she experienced a nervousness quite unusual. Indeed her face flushed, much to her annoyance, and there was a marked air of constraint in her manner toward the young Englishman. With extreme care, she placed herself as remote from him as possible, and was distinctly conscious that she talked in a most spasmodic way, jerky as she described it afterward, sometimes voluble beyond her wont and at others strangely silent.

After they had conversed for possibly a half an hour, Merrimount, to her great alarm, asked Mr. Stanton if he would grant him a few moments of private conversation. Intuitively grasping his purpose she rose from her seat half in protest, but sank back again, realizing the impropriety of assuming to know what that purpose was. Her action was not noticed by anyone else, nevertheless she felt the hot blood rushing to her face, as she imagined that everyone had noticed her action and knew its meaning.

The old lawyer, acceding to Merrimount's request, led the way into the library, supposing the conference requested bore some relation to the matter which was uppermost in the minds of all. His astonishment was vast, and even ludicrous, when the young nobleman abruptly announced that he had done himself the honor to declare his love for Wallis. Mr. Stanton fairly fell back in his chair limp through amazement. So ludicrous indeed was his appearance that Merrimount struggled hard to conceal his desire to laugh.

"I do not know your customs in the affairs of the heart," he went on, "but I conceive that the duty resting upon a man who has placed himself in the position I have, is the same here as at home. Therefore I feel that I should not go further without acquainting you of what I have done and asking your acquiescence in further proceedings."

"I never was so much astonished in my life," said the old lawyer, recovering himself. "I suppose since you have made the declaration to Wallis that there is little need of coming to me. Young ladies in this country seem to have taken it to themselves to settle these matters without the advice or assistance of their elders. But we all supposed here that Hetlow's daughter was the one you sought."

"So I learned from Wallis," replied Merrimount. "But it is not so. The proposition which I had the honor to submit to Mr. Hetlow, knowledge of which seems to have gone beyond us, has been wholly misapprehended. It had no relation to my choice of a wife."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Stanton. After a moment's hesitation, he added, "I presume Wallis has given her consent?"

"Upon the contrary," replied Merrimount, "she has not. She has left me to sue again. She did not deny me, nor did she forbid me to talk with her again upon the matter. Indeed I may say that she gave me permission to hope for a favorable response."

"Well," said Mr. Stanton, "I doubt very much whether my consent, or the withholding of it, would be a factor in the problem. If Wallis wants to marry you she will, and if she don't she won't, and whatever side of the case I might be on I would exert no influence upon it. I am free to say to you I have never fancied the idea of our American girls marrying foreigners, or into a rank of life so far removed from the habits and ideas they are accustomed to. The training and as-

sociations, shaping and formulating as they must be, obtaining in your walk of life, are as different, I take it, from anything this country affords as they well can be. I have doubted the advisability of these international marriages and the resulting happiness. That however has been a general reflection on my part. Treating you as a man, apart from any other consideration, I can say, sincerely, I have a very great regard for you, and can see no possible objection to you as a husband for Wallis."

"It is as a man I desire to be judged," interjected the young nobleman, bowing in a rather stately manner to the lawyer.

"If you were a producer, a laborer with hand or head," pursued Mr. Stanton, "I should be better pleased. I suppose you will call that sturdy democracy. But it is not, it is only the result of my education."

"I am seeking to be just that," replied Merrimount smiling; "to seek to enter commerce is the purpose of my visit to America."

The old lawyer looked at him keenly for a moment or two without speaking, and then said:

"Ah! well. I cannot offer any objections to you as a man; such as I have go wholly to your rank. I presume, however, it is that very rank which will make you successful with Wallis."

"Upon the contrary," laughed the young nobleman, "I fear that very rank is one of the obstacles. Evidently Miss Gladwin is as strong a republican as the fiercest democrat could wish. That, and the fact that I am not rich, seem to be the stumbling-blocks."

The old lawyer laughed heartily.

"Do not believe her for a moment," he said; "that is so far as money is concerned. It is merely a caprice of hers to talk that way."

"So I supposed," replied Merrimount. "But I find that if I win her, I must do so as Eric Lacey and not

as Lord Merrimount. I must win her as a commoner without reference to my rank and station, and solely by reason of my ability to impress my qualities upon her. I am very much pleased that it is so, and," rising as he spoke, "I know that if I am successful in my suit, I shall have won a heart of gold as well as a most charming companion."

Mr. Stanton rose at the same moment and said feelingly :

" Wallis is a good girl, true and loyal, and will make any man a good wife. What she may be in the rank of life to which you propose to transplant her, the future alone can tell."

Placing his hand upon the shoulder of the young nobleman, he added :

" Well, sir, you have my consent if such is necessary. God speed you."

They walked out into the hall together and joined the others. Wallis watched their coming with much agitation, which she tried hard to conceal, and successfully. To Mr. Stanton the incident seemed to afford much quiet amusement, although he said nothing as to what had passed between himself and the young Englishman. Mrs. Stanton, during this interview in the library, had left the veranda, and so, when the old lawyer, remarking that he thought he would stroll over to "The Larches," strolled away the four young people were left together.

Lord Merrimount rose from his chair and going to Wallis, bowing, offered her his arm. There was so much determination in his manner that, without realizing what she was doing, she rose and took it. He led her to the other end of the veranda, where he said:

" I thought it my duty to say to your uncle that yesterday I declared my love to you."

Wallis looked up at him quickly and sharply.

" Who gave you permission to do so?" she asked.

" No one, indeed," he said with a smile, " I thought it my duty. I did not tell him that you had

given me permission to do so. Nor did I tell him that you had accepted my suit. Upon the contrary I said that you had given me no more assurance than permission to hope."

"He must have thought then," replied Wallis nervously, "that you came to him on a very slight foundation."

"Do not say that it is slight," he implored earnestly.

Something in Wallis's manner made him add quickly :

"I do not intend to press my suit to-night; I do not want to frighten you, nor do I wish you to think that my conference with your uncle was an endeavor to coerce you, but I felt that I ought to make my intention known, so that there would be no misapprehension as to my purpose. While your uncle was pleased to say that he saw no objection to me as a man, he did as a nobleman——"

"That is just it," interrupted Wallis impulsively.

Then, perceiving the significance that might be given to her words, she tried to withdraw them, but Merrimount pursued the advantage she had given him.

"It is my misfortune," he said, "not my fault. I cannot very well divest myself of the station into which I was born. But I would willingly try, if it were to stand between us. I beg you will look upon it as something inherent to my birth, as you would look upon some slight deformity, and not be cruel because of it."

He took her hands in his and looking down upon her tenderly, without speaking for a moment or two, finally said :

"Wallis, I doubt if it is in my power to make you know how sincere and earnest is the love I bear you. I have looked deeper into your nature than you think. I know the sterling quality of your heart and mind. I know how true, how loyal, how unselfish you are, and if you will but permit me, I will make you my bride and bear you in triumph, proudly, to those who

love me, and who will love you not alone for the sake of me, but for those qualities which have won my love. O Wallis ! I am not a carpet knight, dancing attendance upon my lady, and perhaps I have not those graces which easily win a woman's heart ; but I can promise you a deep devotion, a protecting care, and a loving heart. I ask you only to think of me, as your uncle says, as a man. I beseech you to cast aside every consideration other than that I will be a true lover and a good husband to you. I cannot promise you a grand life. That is not in my power. At the very best I am a younger son, but I can promise you a never failing love. I shall not worry you. I shall not again speak of my love for you, until a little time hence, when I will come for my answer. And by that answer, be it for good or for evil, I will abide."

He drew her hand within his arm and, without waiting for a remark from her, led her back to the others, trembling and quite subdued.

At this moment Mr. Stanton returned from "The Larches," and approaching the group upon the veranda, said :

" Hetlow has just received a note from Harold Pierson, announcing his intention to call upon him to-morrow afternoon, for the purpose of submitting some new proof he has just discovered. It is either an exhibition of impudent audacity, or else we are mistaken in supposing him to be connected with the assault upon Mason."

Then he turned to Dick, and with a grim significance, which was noticed by all, said :

" Mr. Hetlow, Mason, expects you to go over to-morrow afternoon—the hour is three—and after getting through with Pierson, he desires an interview with you."

If the others did not understand what was meant by this, Dick and Bessie did.

A few moments later Merrimount and Bessie left, leaving Dick anxious and Wallis very much disturbed.

CHAPTER XXX.

HAROLD'S PROOF.

MRS. STANTON was much alarmed by the announcement that Harold Pierson was again to visit "The Larches." During the morning she was so preoccupied and nervous that she attracted the attention of Wallis. As much troubled as Wallis had been over the suit that Merrimount was making, and all the more troubled because she had discovered that she had a much greater regard for the young Englishman than she was willing to admit, she finally asked her aunt what it was that was giving her so much distress. The good lady prevaricated, denying that anything extraordinary was occupying her mind. The shrewd Wallis, however, believing that her aunt was not dealing sincerely with her, determined that she would not permit an interview with Harold Pierson if she could prevent it. Thus it was that, in her endeavor to frustrate a meeting between her aunt and young Pierson, she was prevented from going to Bessie, a visit to whom she had promised herself on that morning, in order to consult her as to the offer she had received from Lord Merrimount.

The impending interview with Bessie's father occupied Dick's thoughts during the morning. Bessie had whispered to him the previous evening that when her father called her to account for going upon an excursion of which Dick was a party, she had told her father that she had pledged herself to be Dick's wife, and that her father was very angry, therefore Dick had no doubt as to what the subject of that interview would be. He felt that the issue had come and that he must meet it. He speculated upon the effect it would

have upon himself and Bessie. He was sure of her. That she would be true to him he did not doubt. He determined that, notwithstanding what demand Mr. Hetlow might make, he would refuse to give up the promise of her hand, and that he would abide by such refusal and its consequences. He made no doubt that in the event of such refusal Mr. Hetlow would insist upon the severance of their business relation. While he recognized this was in a measure greatly to be regretted, nevertheless, he felt that it was not wholly a disaster, for his reputation in the trade was high, and that he could quickly establish a new relation, which, if it did not promise as well for the future, would be immediately as advantageous.

Its effect upon Bessie, however, was what troubled him most. Whether she would be willing to accept disinheritance and leave her home he had grave doubts. He recognized that it was a serious situation for her, and felt it would be too much to ask of her immediately. He therefore determined that he would go no further with Mr. Hetlow than to refuse to break his relations with Bessie, to promise nothing, and then to be guided by future developments. During the morning Mr. Stanton had wandered about in a moody frame of mind, unable to settle himself upon any occupation. As the hour approached for them to go to "The Larches" he said to Dick :

"I bound myself by a foolish promise not to say anything to you about an event which will occur. I have made up my mind that I will not violate that promise in any way, by warning you to be prepared for an attack upon yourself in a matter which, I presume, is nearer your heart just at present than any other thing in the world."

"I understand you, sir," replied Dick, "and I thank you for the warning. I know quite as well what it will be, as if you had told me. I have been

thinking about it all the morning. And I have firmly determined upon my course, let the consequences be what they may."

"I would like to give you some advice upon the situation," said Mr. Stanton, "but that would involve the breaking of my promise. And yet I feel that you are in need of cool advice, perhaps as much at this particular time as you ever have been or will be, in your life. Let me say but just one word. Do nothing rash."

"I can do nothing rash," replied Dick, "for I enter upon the matter after cool reflection and ample deliberation. I have laid out my programme and will strictly adhere to it."

He turned upon Mr. Stanton with sudden energy in his voice and determination in his face :

"Nothing will make me consent to give up Bessie."

The old lawyer looked at him for a moment, a gleam lighting up his eyes, and then turned away from him with the remark : "Well, it is time to go over. Do you think you are able to walk, or shall I have the carriage brought up for you to ride?"

Dick replied that a carriage was not necessary, and providing himself with a walking-stick the two set out. They had not gone far, before Wallis called after them to wait for her, saying, with a laugh, that she had been at all of the *séances* touching the Dugdale claim, and could not miss the present one.

"Besides," she said, with a gay laugh, "I have a lover there, and I must look after him."

Dick did not take this in, but her uncle looked down upon her curiously, laughing the while.

Arriving at the house they found Harold Pierson had not yet arrived ; that Lord Merrimount after lunch had gone out for a row upon the river ; and that Bessie was in her room. To her Wallis went immediately. Mr. Hetlow was in the library, and thither Mr. Stanton and Dick went. In his greeting

of Dick, Mr. Hetlow was ceremoniously polite, formal, cold, and precise. They were hardly seated when Harold Pierson drove up to the door. A moment later he was announced in the library. There was nothing to be noticed in his manner differing from that which had marked it on previous occasions. Noting upon the face of Dick marks of his previous day's experience he inquired if Dick had met with an accident. Mr. Stanton broke in, before Dick could reply, with the remark :

“Nothing less than an attempt at murder.”

If it was his intention to throw Harold Pierson off his guard he signally failed. With an assumption of extreme solicitude Harold inquired anxiously for the particulars, manifested deep interest in the recital, expressed detestation over the deed, and wondered what could be the motive of it.

Mr. Stanton, with increased sharpness and asperity of tone, said :

“We connect it with an event which has absorbed a great deal of our thought and time.”

Harold Pierson looked at him wonderingly, and with the air of a man too polite to inquire as to the meaning of his speech so purposely guarded.

Mr. Hetlow prevented further conversation in this direction by saying to young Pierson that he had received his note, and was ready to look at the proof which he had asked to submit.

The young man thereupon took from his pocket a package, which he laid on the table before him, saying :

“I do not know how you will regard this, but it seems to me far more important than anything I have yet laid before you. I think it is well worthy your consideration ; my counsel insists that it is well-nigh, if not wholly, conclusive. If the comparison which I desire to make is permitted me, and the proof should stand the test of such comparison, I

shall myself be disposed to believe that the proof is made and the end is reached."

As he talked he unwrapped the package and laid out the papers. No remark was made by anyone when he concluded. He added in a somewhat disappointed air :

" Of course I know it is a great favor I ask, to compare the letters of Edmund Dugdale received by his father, and unquestionably authentic, with the note we have here purporting to have been written by him. I quite understand that, occupying the position you do, insisting that the burden of proof rests upon our shoulders, nothing compels you, even from a moral standpoint, to accede to my request. I therefore want to say, as I said upon a previous occasion, that one of the chief desires I have is to assure you of the truth of my claim, and that I will be content with nothing short of a full acquiescence upon your part that I am indeed the son of Edmund Dugdale. I ask it, therefore, more with the idea that you should be satisfied by such comparison than that I should gratify myself by making it."

Mr. Hetlow, rising from his chair, said hastily and warmly :

" Of course your request is granted. It never entered into my head to deny it. I conceive it to be very proper."

Mr. Stanton, however, interposed by saying :

" In a strict legal proceeding, Mr. Hetlow, one occupying the position you do would use a document, such as you have in your possession, in an attempt to confound rather than to assist the other side."

" But this is not a strict legal proceeding," said Mr. Hetlow rather irritably. " If Mr. Pierson has a letter written by Edmund Dugdale that fact can be established as conclusively here as in a court of law."

The merchant went to a cabinet in the corner of the room, and taking from it a bundle of papers came

back to the table. Running over the end of it, he drew out a paper which he laid before him and resumed his seat.

Laying his hand upon this paper he said : "I have here a letter written by Edmund Dugdale during the year of his death, concerning the authenticity of which there can be no doubt."

"Then we can proceed," said Harold Pierson.

He lifted the first letter at his hand. It was the one purporting to be addressed by James Powers to Mrs. Orton Pierson.

"Quite evidently," he said, "Mr. Powers was not an educated man. His writing is somewhat hard to decipher. The letter tells its own story."

He read :

n. y. Sept 10, 1856.

"Mrs. pierson

"madam :

" My Wife has fond a Shirt what
belongs to the child you have Adopt i sind it you how
is the child gitting on i hope is good and is a komfort
to you he is a quite child it has a good whome and i
hope its so you will be good to it its father Edmund
dugdale was a gentleman and a good man.

"Yours &c.,

"JAMES POWERS."

He laid it down, looking to the others for comment. None was made. Dick reached forward, took the letter, inspected it closely, turned it over, and observed the paper upon which it was written. The paper bore every appearance of age, and the letter of having been penned by an illiterate man. He thought that if the letter was a forgery it was a most skillful one.

He laid it back on the table.

Harold Pierson took up another paper. It was a certificate signed by James Powers and his wife, set-

ting forth that the child taken by Mrs. Orton Pierson on August 29, 1856, was the child of Edmund Dugdale, who was a lodger with them, and who had died on July 8, 1856, in their house.

Dick examined this also, comparing its signature with the one of the letter. Even to his practiced eye the two seemed to be exactly the same. This one Mr. Stanton examined. Harold Pierson this time did not wait for comments when he had perused it, but hurried on to the next.

This was one purporting to be a letter written by Edmund Dugdale to Mrs. Tomlinson.

"This letter," he said, "we can give no explanation of. It was found among Mrs. Orton Pierson's papers with the two I have just read. It is supposed, however, that it was written a day or two before his death but never dispatched. It is brief and—pathetic."

"MRS. TOMLINSON :

"I do not think I will last long. I am growing weaker hourly. I want to see my child once more and clasp him in my arms before I die. Will you not bring him to me?

"Yours thankfully,

"EDMUND DUGDALE."

Dick thought he observed signs of anxiety and nervousness in young Pierson's manner while he was reading this letter. But the thought was driven from his mind by another and that was, that the letter fitted in well with the story Mrs. Tomlinson had told him.

Mr. Hetlow took up the letter of Edmund Dugdale lying before him, an action noticed by Harold Pierson.

"One moment," he said. "Before any comparison is made, let me dispose of the remaining paper."

He then read an affidavit made by Thomas Fullgrave, setting forth in that verbose phraseology lawyers

so delight in, that he was cognizant of the facts of the adoption of the child of Edmund Dugdale, and that of his own knowledge he knew that the child delivered by James Powers and his wife to Orton Pierson and his wife was the child of Edmund Dugdale.

Having finished he returned all of the papers to his pocket, save the one purporting to have been written by Edmund Dugdale, and passed around to the side of the table where Mr. Hetlow was sitting, and laid it before Mr. Hetlow.

Dick and Mr. Stanton rose and took positions behind Mr. Hetlow, over whose shoulders they could observe the comparison between the two letters.

A glance was sufficient to determine the similarity of the hand. The chance taken by the conspirators in writing this letter was determined in their favor. They had made no mistake. It would have required eyes more expert than were in Mr. Hetlow's library to have determined which one was the forgery. By one of those singular chances that are continually turning up to confound the theory of probability, the paper, upon which these separate documents were written, was so nearly alike that it seemed as if they had come from the same ream.

Mr. Stanton was dumfounded. The proof seemed to be complete.

Dick could pick no flaw, and he appealed to Mr. Stanton to make the objection he looked for but could not find. So in fact did Mr. Hetlow. Finding that Mr. Stanton made no remark, Mr. Hetlow said :

“ Your proof is conclusive. It would appear I must accept you in fact as the heir to the Dugdale estates.”

“ Yes,” said the old lawyer, more to himself than to the others, “ the establishment of these proofs would settle the question.”

Dick, deeply disappointed, acquiesced in the judgment of Mr. Stanton.

“ Mr. Pierson, or Mr. Dugdale, as we will have to

undoubtedly call you after this," said the old lawyer, "your proofs are strong. I confess recently I have not been of the opinion that you were the heir. Certain facts, gathered chiefly by Mr. Mason here, led me to believe that either you, yourself, were a victim, or that you were a swindler. It now appears that I have wronged you in my thoughts. Indeed I became convinced, when the assault was made upon Mason, that in some way it was connected with your claim."

"Great God!" exclaimed young Pierson, leaping from his chair in which he had seated himself, his manner and voice representing well simulated horror, "you surely did not believe me guilty of such an act?"

His manner made a profound impression.

"For a time I did," said Mr. Stanton coolly.

"Great God!" repeated young Pierson, seating himself again.

It seemed as if he were horror-stricken with the idea. So deceived was Dick by his manner that he said :

"I am sure, Mr. Pierson, that Mr. Stanton believes so no longer."

Harold looked at him gratefully. Turning to Mr. Stanton, he said :

"You say certain facts, gathered by Mr. Mason, had led you to be suspicious. Will you not question me as to them? I will reply frankly, and as fully as I can. Perhaps I may entirely satisfy you."

"The first is," said Mr. Stanton, grasping eagerly at the opportunity, "that running parallel with our search was another one, which we finally discovered to be conducted by persons with whom you were in close association. When Mr. Mason first found Mrs. Tomlinson he also found that a man had preceded him with precisely the same inquiry. When agents were employed in Newark to find trace of James

Powers, it was learned that the same man had preceded them. When within a week Mr. Mason went to Philadelphia to consult a certain Mrs. Jenkins, again he found that the same man had preceded him there. And this man was one you met daily."

"Only recently," exclaimed Harold Pierson hastily, and, as Dick thought, with some alarm. "I can explain this to your satisfaction. A man named Ranson, with whom until quite recently I had no acquaintance—the one whose communication to Mr. Mason found me out—had some knowledge that the Dugdale estate would fall to the child of Edmund Dugdale, if he could be found. It was he who instituted this search you speak of. He employed a man named Moore to visit Mrs. Tomlinson and also to search in Newark for trace of James Powers. It was when he had determined that I was the child for whom they sought that he went to Mr. Mason. Although he assumed to Mr. Mason to have little knowledge of me, for he is a man of indirect methods, his purpose was to induce Mr. Mason to make the examination himself and thus help him in the search he was making. Subsequent to all this he presented himself to me, and it was after I had been sent for by Mr. Hetlow, offering to assist me to the proof of my identity. But he bargained for a considerable sum in payment before he would give me such proof. Since that time he has been officious, and indeed pertinacious, in attendance upon us, forcing himself upon Mr. Orton Pierson and myself—both he and Moore—both of whom expect considerable sums upon the successful establishment of my claim. And I am bound to say that his knowledge gained by inquiry, and as well his recollection, have been of the greatest value. And I must further concede that it is very doubtful whether I would have been identified as the person sought for, had it not been for his efforts."

This was plausible and apparently said in the frankest manner. Mr. Stanton was imposed upon, as was shown by the weak manner in which he touched upon Dick's discovery of young Pierson in the company of Ransom in Jackson Street.

"It was to obtain the very affidavit that I read here to-night, that I accompanied Ransom to that place," replied Harold promptly.

"Then," said Mr. Stanton, "Mason is quite certain that he has seen Ransom more than once in this neighborhood, in relation with at least one of Mr. Hetlow's employees."

Dick thought he saw an expression of alarm flit over the face of the young man. It was but for an instant however, for he replied calmly :

"Quite possibly. As I say, he is given to indirect methods and evidently is fond of mysterious proceedings. I know that he haunted this neighborhood upon some theory that you were opposed to my claim, and that he might find something of importance to us. I cannot say I admire these methods or justify them—indeed I have more than once put my foot upon some of them. Yet he has been very valuable to us."

"Then there is that attempted burglary upon my house," suggested the lawyer.

"I know absolutely nothing about it. Had Ransom been concerned in that, and I do not want you to believe for a moment that I think so, I would have been the last person he would have let know. For he knows well I would not have countenanced it. I can only tell you that Ransom reported to me that Mrs. Jenkins had come with a box to your house. He already knew that Mrs. Jenkins was the daughter of James Powers."

"And the assault on Mason?"

"I know no more of that than the other. For Heaven's sake, why should that attack have been made upon my account?" he continued. "What was to

be gained by it? What end would have been served? If I was, in fact, Edmund Dugdale's child, Mr. Mason's opposition would not have prevented the proof of my claim. If I was not, the sacrifice of his life would not have supplied my want of proof."

It was Mr. Hetlow now who thought young Pierson was too glib and too well supplied with argument.

"I shall be prepared to be questioned on anything touching Ransom's acts," continued Harold; "he has been very busy, very active, and he is deeply concerned for the money he has been promised in the event of my succession to the Dugdale estates. He is thoroughly convinced that I am the heir, and he works hard that there may be no failure in the proof."

So frank had he been that there was no effort made by anyone to combat his statements.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DETECTED AND CAPTURED.

WHILE this conference was going forward at "The Larches," Mrs. Stanton was in a condition of mind bordering on the frantic at Springhill.

From time to time she walked to the end of the veranda from which a view of "The Larches" could be had, to watch for the return of her husband. She feared Harold Pierson would confess his participation in the burglary and, thus involving her, expose her to her husband's anger. At one time she wished she had accompanied the others so that she could have escaped the suspense she was now suffering from, while at other times she was glad she had not, for had the revelation been made in her presence, she felt she would have been covered with confusion and humiliation before the others.

In this most uncomfortable frame of mind she wandered about the house. She went into the library and, taking the box out of the drawer in which she had placed it, tried without success to open it.

Suddenly it occurred to her that when that morning she had gone into the room occupied by Dick, to see that it had been properly cared for, she had seen a small key lying upon the dressing-case.

Fired by the thought that it might possibly be the key to the box, and that if it were, she could obtain the information therefrom by which to confound her husband, were he to come home with the knowledge of the foolish confidence she had given to Harold Pierson, she hastened upstairs. She found the key still lying on the case, and securing it hurried back to

the library. It fitted the lock. With trembling fingers she threw the box open. A few papers were inside. She opened and read the first one at hand. It caused her to exclaim aloud. Hurriedly she ran over the others. As she read her agitation increased.

The information she was gathering seemed to overwhelm her. Her breath came fast, and her heart beat hard. For a moment she thought she would swoon. She clasped her head with one hand, and tried to still the beating of her heart with the other. What it all meant suddenly burst upon her, and with it the recognition of the necessity for action.

Tumbling the papers back into the box she clasped it in her arms and hurried out in the direction of "The Larches," without waiting for bonnet or shawl.

Arriving at the entrance of the house she entered out of breath, too much excited to return the salutation of Lord Merrimount, who was returning from the river by another path.

In the hall she encountered a servant and inquired for her husband. Being told that he was in the library with Mr. Hetlow, she implored the servant to go to him immediately and tell him that she must see him at once.

She seated herself upon a hall chair, exhausted by her agitation and rapid run from Springhill. When her husband came to her he perceived her agitation and, alarmed, inquired as to its cause :

"Here," she cried, "is the 'Jenkins' box."

"Heavens! where did you find it?" he asked.

"Don't ask me," she gasped out; "don't wait to know. Open it—look at it!"

Wondering at her emotion Mr. Stanton took the box from her, and seating himself beside her, opening it, leisurely began an examination of its contents.

His leisurely manner however quickly disappeared. He read the first paper he took out with increasing interest and excitement. As Mrs. Stanton had done

he hurriedly snatched the others, and with rapid glances caught their sense and realized their importance.

As he read he ejaculated unintelligibly, while his excitement grew with every moment, until he exclaimed aloud :

“Great God ! What a revelation !”

He tossed the papers back into the box, closed it with a loud noise and, thrusting it under his arm, rapidly strode into the library.

The three were upon their feet.

Harold Pierson was about to depart, satisfied that he had allayed all suspicion, that all had succumbed to the strength of the proof he had submitted, and that it was now only a question of time when he would secure the estates, unopposed by Mr. Hetlow.

As he entered, Mr. Stanton cast upon him a glance of stern severity.

“One moment,” he said. “We have not done with you.”

Young Pierson saw the box under his arm and was immediately filled with alarm. The blood fled from his face as he leaped to the conclusion that the box was the Jenkins box, to obtain which the burglary had been committed.

“You say,” said Mr. Stanton, “that you are the son of Edmund Dugdale ?”

Harold made a mighty effort to control himself, while Mr. Hetlow and Dick looked with surprise upon the excitement of the old lawyer, usually so self-possessed. ~

“I say that I am,” replied Harold, “and you know I am, from the proofs I have this day submitted.”

“They are false,” cried the lawyer. “You are a swindler. This box—the Jenkins box—for which you robbed my house, proves you are.”

Moved by sudden fright and anger Harold threw himself forward, as if he would either strike the old

man, or wrest the box from him. Thinking that he meant to strike Mr. Stanton, sore and bruised as he was, Dick stepped in between them to prevent it.

But Harold controlled himself in time.

"Are you wild?" cried Mr. Hetlow to Mr. Stanton.

"No, I am not. I have become suddenly possessed of the proof as to who is the real Dugdale. Here! here it is!" tapping the box. "It is not Harold Pierson but——"

He hesitated a moment as with an impressive gesture he swept his arm up, and exclaimed, pointing to him:

"It is Richard Mason! There! He is the true heir!"

Dick, utterly overwhelmed, dropped into the chair behind him, as if he were shot.

Mr. Hetlow, amazed, thought the lawyer had been suddenly bereft of his senses. He stared at him almost stupidly.

In the meantime, attracted by the confusion, Bessie and Wallis who, in the hall, had vainly endeavored to obtain from Mrs. Stanton its meaning, entered the library in time to hear Mr. Stanton's announcement and Mr. Hetlow's contemptuous reply of:

"Pshaw! man!"

"Do you not believe it?" asked the old lawyer energetically, throwing the box on the large table in such a manner that it slid over its smooth surface directly to the hand of Mr. Hetlow. "Then examine the contents of that box."

Mr. Hetlow opened the box, and looking at the papers, became convinced as quickly as the lawyer had been.

During this exchange Harold Pierson had been anxiously looking from one to the other. He did not know what those contents were, nor how strong the proof of the announcement Mr. Stanton had made

was, nor whether he could combat it, nor indeed whether the day was lost to him or only endangered.

He made a gallant effort.

"Sir!" he said to the old lawyer, "you are hasty with your epithets. In a court of law you will be given an opportunity to sustain them."

"I will sustain them," excitedly exclaimed the lawyer. "The proof in that box is conclusive."

All of this time Harold Pierson had been standing immediately in front of the fire blazing openly upon the hearth.

When Mr. Stanton made this declaration, he tossed the papers which he had brought with him as proofs, deftly, without being observed, into the fire. He had hardly done so when Lord Merrimount entered the room. Turning to see who it was, Harold started back so violently in his surprise that he nearly fell.

"Eric Lacey!" he exclaimed aghast.

"Great God! Allan Mark Everard!"

"Who?" cried rather than asked Mr. Stanton. "That man claims to be young Dugdale, and to be named Harold Pierson."

"He!" cried Merrimount. "He? Nonsense! He is Allan Mark Everard. He was my fag at Eton. I have known him since he was a lad, and his family as well."

Mr. Hetlow and Dick had risen from their seats. They were regarding the two young men with interest the most intense.

Mrs. Stanton sat in a chair trembling with excitement, while Bessie and Wallis, hardly grasping the situation, were supporting each other.

"That man," said Mr. Stanton, pointing to Harold, now standing with bended head, shamestricken before his old schoolmate, all his assurance gone, knowing full well that his game was lost, "that man is the one who has claimed to be Harold Pierson, adopted

by Orton Pierson as the child of Edmund Dugdale, and pretends that he was born in New York in 1856. He is the claimant to the Dugdale estate."

Merrimount cast upon the poor wretch a look of bitter contempt.

"That man," he said slowly, "is Allan Mark Everard of the Everards of Lancashire, the banking family. He comes from the same county as my family. We were at Eton together, where he was my fag. He was at Cambridge too, when I was there. I have known him since he was a little lad. He went wrong early. He was put in the Paris branch of his family's bank and was caught in theft and forgery. French justice dealt with him and he was put in prison there, from which, as I heard some time ago, he fled. He is an escaped convict, a disgrace to his name and abandoned by his family!"

"Are you satisfied at last?" asked Mr. Stanton of Mr. Hetlow.

Overwhelmed by the proof he could no longer combat Mr. Hetlow meekly replied that he was.

"The next thing to do is to put this scamp, who has hesitated at neither burglary, nor murder, to secure his ends, into the hands of the law," said Mr. Stanton. "Someone send a servant to the village for an officer."

Harold Pierson was aroused by this command. He lifted his head and looked boldly at Mr. Stanton, who had thus taken direction of affairs.

"It is all up," he said. "The game is lost. It was worth playing for. The stakes were large. I confess. Everything is true except the attempt at murder. I did not commit the burglary, but it was done at my direction. I knew of the box brought by Mrs. Jenkins." He looked at Mrs. Stanton trembling in her seat, momentarily expecting exposure, and laughed scornfully. "I learned it from Mrs. Stanton, who was silly enough to tell me of it. But the attempt on Mason I am not responsible for. Certain men stationed here as spies by

Ransom did make the attack without our knowledge. How much Ransom knew of it or was a party to I can't tell. But I knew nothing of it until yesterday morning. You may believe this or not, as you see fit; but it is true. Now, do with me as you will. I have played my part, and if it were not for an accident, and the appearance of Eric Lacey, I would have won. So you've come into a title, old man? You are the Lord Merrimount, eh? I had forgotten it was in the family."

Merrimount went to him and, standing before him, said earnestly :

"Do you say on your honor—pshaw! You have none—but are you telling me the truth when you say you knew nothing of this attempt on Mason's life?"

"I tell you the exact truth, Lacey."

"How am I to believe you?"

"Because you never knew me to lie to you in the old fag days."

"That is true. You never did."

The young nobleman strode across the room, threw up the sash of the window looking upon the lawn, and pushed open the outer blind.

"I do not want to be, and will not be, responsible for the arrest and imprisonment of the old school-fellow whom I have exposed."

He looked sternly at Harold Pierson.

"In the belief that you have told me the truth, and that you had no part in the cowardly attack on Mr. Mason, I tell you to fly."

He pointed to the open window. Looking at the others in the room, he said :

"We'll give the poor beggar a chance for his liberty. He'll be hunted down quickly enough, God knows!"

Then turning to Harold Pierson again, he said, pointing at the window :

"Go!"

Harold cast a quick glance at Mr. Stanton, then at

Mr. Hetlow, and again at Merrimount still pointing at the open window.

He rushed rapidly to it, stopped as he was about to plunge through it, and said :

"Thank you for the chance, old man. You are the same Eric of the old days—never a sneak, and with always a helping hand for the poor devil in the race."

He leaped lightly through the window, ran hastily across the lawn, and disappeared into the shrubbery.

"That was very wrong, my lord," said Mr. Stanton sternly.

"I think not," replied Merrimount quietly. "You could not have put him under arrest but for my exposure of him, and I do not want the weight upon me of having been responsible for the imprisonment of a poor devil who had been my schoolmate, and with whom I had slept and ate and sported and studied."

Wallis crossed the room shyly, her eyes shining and wet with tears. She placed her hand in that of Merrimount and pressed it, but did not speak.

Merrimount having it, would not let it go.

Mr. Stanton strode angrily into the hall, where he bade a servant to tell the coachman to saddle a horse and come at once to the house. Then he hastily wrote a telegram to Captain Lawton, asking him to arrest Orton Pierson, Dennis Moore, Oliver Ransom, and Harold Pierson, saying that they had been detected in fraud, forgery, and conspiracy.

He called Dick to him and asked him to sign the dispatch, who demurred as to Harold Pierson because of Merrimount, but was finally persuaded to do so by the old lawyer, who insisted that he was only doing his duty.

When they returned to the library they found Mr. Hetlow examining the proofs contained in the tin

box, the others watching him eagerly. As Dick entered, Mr. Hetlow exclaimed :

“ Mason, these proofs are conclusive. Here is the receipt given by Thomas Mason, whose hand I know as well as my own, for the child of Edmund Dugdale, clearly setting forth the story as to how he came to adopt him, and how it came about that the child was in the hands of James Powers. There is no question that the child of Edmund Dugdale was adopted by Thomas Mason, the one who reared and educated you. I have known you from your childhood, and I know that you are the one who is the adopted child of Thomas Mason. You are indeed the heir to the Dugdale estates.”

All of these things had occurred with such rapidity that Dick could hardly comprehend that it was upon him that this great fortune had descended. He said :

“ I can hardly comprehend it, sir. I know I was adopted by Thomas Mason, but how could I have been the son of Edmund Dugdale, and at the same time the nephew of Thomas Mason, who was not of kin of the Dugdales by marriage or otherwise.”

“ Heavens ! ” exclaimed Mr. Stanton, “ but that is so.”

“ No,” replied Mr. Hetlow. “ I can explain that. Tom Mason grew to be very fond of you, and when he believed it was his duty to tell you that you were his adopted son he could not bring himself to have you think you were not of his own blood. So he invented the fiction that you were a nephew. I knew it at the time. I have respected his wish in this matter as Mrs. Mason did in her life. I never did know, however, the circumstances surrounding your adoption.”

Dick was silent a long time, a multitude of thoughts rushing over his brain. The future was so vast he could not comprehend it. One thought, however,

burned brightly above all the rest, standing out most vividly. His next speech was a commonplace:

“Then, when I set out upon that search for the child of Edmund Dugdale, I was in fact looking for myself.”

He saw Bessie’s eyes upon him beaming with love. He went to her and, bowing before her, said :

“Though it has been determined that young Pierson is young Dugdale, yet a young Dugdale has been found. It is I who deprive you of these millions. Well, I restore them to you. At your feet I lay them all. They are yours—everything. But there is an incumbrance upon them—it is myself. You cannot take the one without the other. Do you accept them ?”

He had no need to ask. The love and consent were in her eyes. He took her hand, gently drawing her to him—that hand cut and torn through her efforts to save his life, and led her to her father. “Sir,” he said, “I present you the Dugdale heiress. I have bestowed all the wealth upon her—with an incumbrance to be sure—myself. Do you consent that she accept them ?”

“The wind sets from a different quarter than last night, neighbor Hetlow,” laughed Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Hetlow, secretly pleased in his heart, ashamed now of his previous opposition, and greatly annoyed by Mr. Stanton’s remark, did not withhold his consent.

He had hardly given it when Dick was addressed by Lord Merrimount, who said :

“Mason, I came here the bearer of a proposition from my father to Mr. Hetlow, but as events have turned, it is to you I must make it.”

“I know what it is,” cried Dick, for Wallis had informed him only that morning. “The offer is accepted,” extending his hand to the young Englishman. “It shall be as you wish, and I will be only too glad to have you as a partner in the largest wool house in the world.”

He looked at the young nobleman beamingly and added, for he had a glimmer as to the truth, with a strong pressure of his hand:

"And I hope your other desires will be as successful as this has been."

The young nobleman returned the pressure of his hand with a grateful smile, and then crossed to the window, where Wallis was standing, apparently absorbed in something upon the lawn.

"Wallis," he said, "did you hear? I am a merchant now. I am in trade. The title is only a little bit of an objection. I have come for my answer."

Wallis flirted her shoulders, and would neither turn nor reply.

"My answer, please! I must have it. Your duties as the guardian angel of one love-affair have come to an end. Be the guardian angel of mine."

She whirled about, and extending her hand, blushes on her cheeks, a merry twinkle in her eyes, exclaimed in a tone of irritation utterly at variance with the expression of her face:

"I suppose I must, then. I never saw such a persistent man. I can get rid of you no other way. There! And much joy may I be to you."

Merrimount led her to her uncle.

"I am a producer now, Mr. Stanton. May I have her?"

"This baggage?" asked the old lawyer, much amused, and looking kindly upon them. "Oh, yes, I suppose I must give her up."

"The dearest, the most precious and valuable baggage in the world," said Lord Merrimount amidst much laughter. "My American valise full of all the comforts."

"What?" cried Mrs. Stanton, who had been sitting quietly by, devoutly thankful she had not been exposed, "Wallis, Lady Merrimount?"

"Oh, no; I am Wallis yet," cried that young lady, with her cheeks aflame, and her eyes dancing as she looked up into Merrimount's face, with a glance that, despite her tongue, told him his heart's desire was accomplished.

"And ever will be," cried Dick. "Wallis the true friend and the loyal heart."

"I suppose, auntie," said Wallis, in an endeavor to cover her confusion, "you will not forgive me for throwing myself away, but then I couldn't help it. And oh, dear, I always promised myself a rich husband!"

The servant announced dinner at this point, and Mr.

Hetlow insisted that all should remain and celebrate the engagements at his table.

The interview he was to have with Dick after the conference with Harold Pierson was forgotten in the superior interests.

Dick accompanied Lord Merrimount to England a few weeks later, to take possession of his estates. After arranging for Lord Merrimount's admission as a partner in the business he returned.

In June of the following year Lord Merrimount crossed to America, and he and Wallis were married, at the same time that Dick and Bessie were, at "The Larches." They went to England immediately thereafter, where the interests of the newly made husbands lay.

Wallis, as her husband had predicted, was accepted by his family, not alone because she was Merrimount's wife, but for her own true self. Her bright, independent personality made her a petted favorite, and in her husband's circle she was soon known as "the terrible Radical who disdained rank and desired wealth."

Bessie is known to London as "the beautiful American," a title of which Dick is very proud.

Captain Lawton captured all the conspirators except Harold Pierson, on the day he received the dispatch sent by Mr. Stanton. In the following July, in Chicago, Harold Pierson was found, but when the officer took him in charge, before he could be prevented, he shot himself through the heart, preferring death to imprisonment.

Orton Pierson and Moore were acquitted for want of sufficient evidence when placed on trial in the fall, but Ransom, perhaps as much for other crimes as for his participation in the conspiracy, was sentenced for a term of ten years in the State's prison.

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